

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**WEDNESDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER, 2017**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

|   | <u>Pages</u> |
|---|--------------|
| Minutes ... ..  | 108          |
| Communications from the Chair ... ..                    | 108          |
| Debate on His Excellency the President's Address ... .. | 108-178      |

## List of Speakers:

|     |                             |     |     |     |     |         |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| 1.  | Hon. F.S. Koya              | ... | ... | ... | ... | 108-114 |
| 2.  | Hon. V. Nath                | ... | ... | ... | ... | 115-119 |
| 3.  | Hon. N. Nawaikula           | ... | ... | ... | ... | 119-126 |
| 4.  | Hon. M.A. Niumataiwalu      | ... | ... | ... | ... | 126-130 |
| 5.  | Hon. A.D. O'Connor          | ... | ... | ... | ... | 130-133 |
| 6.  | Hon. H.R.T. Politini        | ... | ... | ... | ... | 134-136 |
| 7.  | Hon. Prof. B.C. Prasad      | ... | ... | ... | ... | 136-143 |
| 8.  | Hon. A.M. Radrodro          | ... | ... | ... | ... | 143-150 |
| 9.  | Hon. S.V. Radrodro          | ... | ... | ... | ... | 150-156 |
| 10. | Hon. Dr. M. Reddy           | ... | ... | ... | ... | 156-163 |
| 11. | Hon. Lt. Col. N. Rika       | ... | ... | ... | ... | 163-166 |
| 12. | Hon. P. Chand               | ... | ... | ... | ... | 166-173 |
| 13. | Hon. Lt. Col. L.B. Tuitubou | ... | ... | ... | ... | 173-178 |

**WEDNESDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER, 2017**

The Parliament resumed at 9.34 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HON. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs [Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts]; the Honourable Minister for Fisheries; the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture; and the Honourable Ratu S.V. Nanovo.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 12th September, 2017, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Acknowledgement

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet, and listening to the radio. We thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Displays - International Day of Democracy

Honourable Members, the Parliamentary Secretariat and the Fijian Elections Office have put up some displays at the foyer to mark the International Day of Democracy 2017. This is celebrated on 15th of September every year.

Additionally, the Fiji Elections Office will also provide voter registration services. I therefore, invite all Honourable Members, guests and members of the public to utilise these services.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS  
BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now resume our debate on His Excellency's Speech and I give the floor to the Honourable Faiyaz Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: Thank you for allowing

me this opportunity to take the floor, to thank His Excellency the President, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote for his most gracious Speech for the Opening of this Session of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I support His Excellency the President's statement in its entirety. Madam Speaker, from the outset let me say, it is very difficult for the other side of the House to comprehend that the 2013...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- ... Constitution has given Fijians the rights that were never given by any other constitution of Fiji.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji has stopped dividing Fijians along racial lines and has brought them together, simply as Fijians.

To this end, Madam Speaker, the Ministries of Industry, Trade and Tourism and Lands and Mineral Resources will continually design and implement programmes and projects to advance ordinary Fijians' socio-economic rights.

Madam Speaker, as announced by His Excellency the President, there will be a number of key legal and commercial reforms to spur and encourage business, commercial and financial opportunities for all Fijians.

To begin with, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism is taking the lead role in the review of the Consumer Credit Act, and the key of the Consumer Credit Act Review is to strengthen the legal framework for the provision of credit and ensuring that customers or debtors are protected and allowed to make informed decisions before entering into a credit contract.

Furthermore, it will mandate a defined legal redress system to allow consumers, which also now includes micro and small businesses. A clear recourse in the event their rights are breached in a credit contract.

Madam Speaker, it is quite ironic how the Opposition talks about providing opportunities to Fijians and empowering them, and in the same breath, they are questioning the very initiative that is providing the much needed opportunities to the grassroots. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, I must say that the Micro and Small Business Grant (MSBG) is the initiative of the FijiFirst Government, which was part of its manifesto, and it began in 2014. The initiative has assisted a total of 12,079 recipients since its launch, thus far, with the total Government investment of \$11.6 million.

Madam Speaker, I wish to put on record and also to correct the Honourable Bulitavu's statement which he made on Monday, with respect to a statement that he alleged that the Permanent Secretary for Industry, Trade and Tourism made. Honourable Bulitavu, Madam Speaker, alleged that the Permanent Secretary stated that the Ministry was having difficulty in monitoring the MSBG.

Madam Speaker, this is an out and out fabrication concocted by the Honourable Bulitavu. In fact, Madam Speaker, the Permanent Secretary himself is involved in spearheading the monitoring, evaluation and mentoring programme for all our grant recipients.

The Ministry, Madam Speaker, has gone to the extent of cross checking and double checking with all official communications pertaining to this Parliamentary Retreat last month and confirms

that Honourable Bulitavu has blatantly misled this august House with his rhetoric on Monday, and he should stop misinforming the Fijian public and not malign names of hardworking and committed civil servants.

This is clearly, Madam Speaker, a lucid example of how the Opposition Members use their status in this House to make false assertions and try and mislead the public.

Madam Speaker, this is rather a mischievous act on the part of an Honourable Member of this House and I, for one, am not afraid to say that it is shameful conduct. Time and time again, the general public is subjected to misleading statements.

Madam Speaker, I want to outline also some of the success stories from the recent assessments for the information of the Opposition, and hope this will help them with a better understanding that recipients are wholeheartedly satisfied with the support that has been provided.

1. Mr. Nacanieli Tuilevuka of Labasa. He was given a grant to purchase cattle for his dairy farm. He earns \$50 to \$100 per week from milk sales. With the profit he earns, Madam Speaker, he has invested into a canteen business selling basic food items. Mr. Tuilevuka is able not only to improve and diversify his income but also contribute to his village and church obligations.
2. Mr. Aisake Cakacaka from Lomaivuna, Naitaisiri was assisted to purchase farming equipment. He is now supplying dalu to Bens Trading Limited and his weekly income is \$200.
3. Ms. Elizabeth Lomani of Wailekutu is operating a canteen business from the support she was provided under the MSBG. She is earning \$100 per week and she is the sole breadwinner for her family, Madam Speaker, and the profits are allowing her to meet her family obligations.
4. Ms. Salima Ali from Seaqaqa, Madam Speaker, a widow with all her children now living in Suva is now able to earn a living from the grant that was provided to her, to operate a canteen and she is able to support herself, without depending on her children. Today, she earns \$100 a week.
5. Ms. Mereoni Cagimaivuna from Seaqaqa, is employing two people to harvest *yaqona*. She is earning about \$120 to \$150 per week.
6. Mr. Gyanendra Prasad of Narere, built a roadside stall from the assistance he received under the MSGB. He is earning \$150 per week.
7. Through the MSBG assistance Mr. Bijay Singh bought a scale for his kava business. The lack of his basic equipment was hindering his ability to undertake his business, Madam Speaker. Today, two years after receiving his grant, he has expanded his business and has three stalls at the Nausori Market. He earns \$2,000 a week from *kava* sale.
8. Mr. Anare Tokakole from Lautoka bought sewing materials for his tailoring business. He has a monthly turnover of \$600 a month. He is now diversifying into retail business by investing into a canteen.

9. Mr. Shiu Ram from Taveuni purchased material for a stall for his bean sales business. His weekly income is \$100. With the profit he earns, he is planning to include more products to sell.
10. Recipients in Taveuni, Madam Speaker, who are mainly *dalo* and *yaqona* farmers are now able to purchase 18 months of fertilizer stock, rather than the monthly buying that they were doing.

Madam Speaker, these are just some of the examples, as we cannot read out the entire list of all the success stories. We will follow this assessment by more field visits, where those who need additional support will be given the necessary assistance and guidance that is required.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge the Opposition to go out and meet the real people and hear from the horse's mouth, rather than coming up with stories to earn political mileage and try and bring disrepute to this noble endeavour of the FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, there is one simple message that we want to convey and that is, the MSBG is contributing to the improvement of livelihoods of ordinary Fijians, giving people the satisfaction that they can take care of their families and that they can make a difference in their communities.

Madam Speaker, all I have been hearing from the Opposition is that the scheme is a waste of taxpayers' money. Well, I am sorry but you are wrong. You are wrong, wrong and wrong again. It is very sad, extremely sad, that the other side of the House do not want our people to progress and contribute to our economy.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I can confidently state that the MSBG has directly impacted the livelihoods of 60,395 Fijians. This is a feat that has never been achieved by any other previous government in the history of this country.

Madam Speaker, I am not plucking these figures out of thin air, like the Opposition does. I have evidence to prove this. That, Madam Speaker, is reality check number one. I hope the message is loud and clear and we, on this side of the House, will do whatever it takes to ensure that no Fijian is left behind, Madam Speaker, and that each and every Fijian counts. We are and we will continue to invest in our Fijian people - young and old.

Madam Speaker, as part of the Ministry's business support service, a total of about 73 trainings have also been conducted since 2015. A total of 2,441 MSBG recipients have received basic financial literacy training. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the MSME Central Coordinating Agency (CCA) has supported over 50 micro and small tourism operators, ranging from the areas of Yasawa, Nadi, Lautoka, Rakiraki, Nadroga, Namosi, Serua, Navua, Suva, Wainibuka, Beqa, Savusavu and Taveuni for a specialised training in August this year. We have these entrepreneurs on our database and they will be assessed every three months by the CCA.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has taken steps to further strengthen the MSME Central Coordinating Authority through building staff capacity also in the field of business development services through the "Start and Improve Your Business Programme". This programme includes a range of training packages and instruments with integrated components for counselling, networking, promotion of services, institutions and policies dialogue.

Madam Speaker, in accordance with His Excellency's Speech, we are also specifically looking after the interest of young Fijians, there is the Young Entrepreneurs Scheme (YES), which is yet another initiative targeting the development of the MSME sector. It is intended to promote and harness the talents of young Fijian entrepreneurs to become 'job creators' rather than be favoured to being 'job seekers'.

Financial support of up to about a maximum of \$20,000 will be given to successful young budding Fijian entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 30 years, to develop or expand that innovative business ideas. The Ministry is currently formalising the appointment of eight accomplished professionals from the private sector with significant experience and business acumen.

We have agreed to partner with Government to spear this exciting initiative, Madam Speaker. In addition, the Ministry has also confirmed eleven private sector organisations thus far, to run a business mentoring programme for these young entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition fails to see the 'big picture' when it criticises Government's programmes. There are a number of programmes that are designed to provide direct support to the most in need and vulnerable, whilst others are structured whereby benefits will not be realised overnight or see but will be felt over a period of time. These are geared toward fostering sustainable employment and livelihoods, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the proof is in the pudding and this is reality check number two. Fiji's credit rating has been upgraded by Moody's - from B1 to Ba3.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Ba.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Listen, listen! Just hear it, please, you do not like it when it is good news.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Fiji's credit rating has been upgraded by Moody's from B1 to Ba3 with a stable outlook, and this is the reality check number 3. And one of the critical contributing Government policies that enabled the upgrade was the support provided to MSMEs. Read that and weep!

Madam Speaker, moving on to the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, His Excellency the President stated that we will have legislations to reform town planning, land tenancy and subdivision of land.

The Ministry has taken a directive approach to engage closely with our lessees and the general public. For this financial year, Madam Speaker, we have started with our Ministerial Roadshows in the Western Division last week and extending to the rest of the divisions. This is to ascertain processes that need revisiting and issues that need addressing. We are taking ownership of our processes and we have heard first-hand from our lessees, who have raised their views with us. This will be a continuous and on-going exercise.

Madam Speaker, with that in mind, allow me again to inform this august House of the work undertaken by the Ministry in ensuring land tenure and ownership for ordinary Fijians. To-date, Madam Speaker, we have issued a total of 258 approval notices for tenants residing in informal settlements and furthermore, issued 200 lease documents to individuals for residential, agricultural

or commercial purposes, Madam Speaker. Through this process, the Ministry is ensuring that its policy direction is aligned with the Fijian Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also working on a Land Valuation Act, which will consolidate all provisions relating to land valuation, such as services provided by Registered Valuers in terms of registration, code of conduct and ethical standards in general.

Contrary, Madam Speaker, to comments made by Honourable Dulakiverata, the rights of resource-owners are not being ignored. We are continuing within our stride to ensure fair share of royalties are paid to landowners and we have not deviated from that, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We are taking an informed decision on this consultative process. The FijiFirst Government does not act on the whim, Madam Speaker. On such critical issues, we undertake thorough consultation to ensure an absolute balanced outcome, Madam Speaker.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that resource-owners are always consulted before any decision is made with respect to river gravel extraction. The Opposition has blatantly misled this House and the people of Fiji. Let me correct the facts.

Consent on the waiver on fishing rights is obtained from the resource owners which is verified through the necessary documentation by the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission before work is conducted on the site, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, with regards to the issue raised by Honourable Gavoka on the compensation for resource owners in Momi Bay ....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I want to highlight, Madam Speaker, I want to highlight something.

HON. MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Please, just listen!

I want to highlight that the compensation exercise, Madam Speaker, was not undertaken by the FijiFirst Government, but rather undertaken sadly by the SDL Government, the very, very Government, Madam Speaker, that did the infamous land swap.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, this was done by the then SDL Minister for Lands, the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, who presented this proposal to Cabinet. This proposal was approved by the then Cabinet, which was chaired by the former Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase and the Cabinet at that time, and it also included the current Leader of the Opposition. They were able to do the land swap, even though 1997 Constitution so-called entrenched provisions were in effect, Madam Speaker.

With regards to the Momi Bay foreshore, the SDL Government processes did not require a Fisheries Impact Assessment to determine the recompense for Tradition Fishing Rights Owners



(TFRO). Unfortunately, the TFRO were left to undertake negotiations on their own with the investors, Madam Speaker.

It is the FijiFirst Government that has ensured that the TFRO take ownership of their natural resources, through formal leasing arrangements, to maximise returns for the development of their *qoliqoli*, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, once again in relation to the Tau Quarry in Nadroga, I would like to inform the Honourable Gavoka that we are aware of the reserves that are available in that area. It is very naïve of Honourable Gavoka to ask a regulator to undertake exploitation of the resources and also to claim that no outside investment is required for such capital intensive endeavours, Madam Speaker.

As the agency responsible for mineral resources, we ensure that the resource-owners and the resources are protected, Madam Speaker. Therefore, we carefully assess the investors interested in mineral exploration. Tau, Madam Speaker, is part of our database in the plans, in terms of looking for opportunities to ensure that we realise the true potential of the resources and the most important part in a sustainable manner.

Madam Speaker, I would really wish that they would just bother to come and ask the Ministry about the actual facts on the deposits in Tau and not just randomly make unsubstantiated statements. Once again, Madam Speaker, reality check number 3.

Madam Speaker, I would like to finish by making this statement. Our Constitution for the Republic of Fiji was given a test in the Elections and that was our referendum in respect to that particular Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, was the big blue tick and the mandate for the FijiFirst Government to govern, Madam Speaker. Reality check number 4.

The Honourable Prime Minister in his speech, and I think everyone should hear this, the Honourable Prime Minister in his speech said that he dedicated his life to serve and will continue to represent the Fijian people to the best of his ability. By the same token, Madam Speaker, every single member on this side of the House stands behind our Honourable Prime Minister in that very quest to serve the Fijian people to the best of their ability, and we all stand behind him.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- All are rejects.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- He may classify us as “rejects” but we classify them as ‘fakes’, Madam Speaker.

I once again, Madam Speaker, commend His Excellency the President for delivering spurring words to open this Parliament Session and I again reiterate our committed stance to ensuring a sustainable environment and a bright economic future for all Fijians. *Vinaka vakalevu* and God bless Fiji and God bless this House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. I would just like to make some clarifications. Firstly, is that, if there is any information stated in this House that is misleading, the onus is on the MPs, you MPs yourselves to correct that misleading information. Just a mere

withdrawal is not effective. Secondly, if an Honourable Member is speaking and the interjection is too loud, you can stop, we will give you extra time, until you feel that you are able to continue. It is very important that you are heard and I beg the indulgence of Honourable Members on these notes. Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Vijay Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Honourable Speaker, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: *Bula vinaka* and *Namaskar*.

Last week, our President opened Parliament with very strong words of challenge to encourage all of us. In line with his vision and with your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I would like to focus my contribution predominantly on infrastructure and connectivity. I wish to focus my presentation on the water and energy sector.

Madam Speaker, our Government, together with Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), has an obligation under Section 36 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji to provide access and adequate supply of clean and safe drinking water to all Fijians. The goal is to achieve 95 percent coverage of the total population having access to clean drinking water by 2025 from the current 88 percent. This target is defined under the Government's Green Growth Framework - Thematic 6, which WAF is mandated to accomplish.

WAF is also playing its global role in working towards Goal 6 of the Sustainable Development Goal set by the United Nations in ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Madam Speaker, WAF has been allocated a capital budget of \$217 million in this year's budget to ensure that we achieve some of these goals. More importantly, the rural schemes allocation has significantly increased to \$27 million, demonstrating Government's commitment in our rural communities. This allocation will deliver 176 rural projects, benefiting approximately 49,780 rural population.

Madam Speaker, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), European Investment Bank (EIB) and our Government is providing financial assistance over the next three years, targeted towards water and wastewater infrastructure development, non-revenue water reduction and WAF's capacity building. One of the major projects is the Rewa/Viria Project set to be completed by year 2021. This will ensure that we increase service coverage and improve reliable water supply 24/7 to approximately 340,000 population living within the Suva-Nausori corridor and around.

Madam Speaker, in the area of wastewater, the national coverage is low at 44 percent. The WAF is currently engaged in the augmentation and consolidation works of its biggest wastewater treatment plant in Kinoya. The Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Plant serves the Suva-Nausori corridor and will be equipped up to 150,000 Equivalent Population, and further upon completion of this upgrading work under the ADB project, the plant will be subsequently extended up to 277,000 Equivalent Population.

Madam Speaker, WAF is prioritising on expanding the sewer coverage to urban commercial-zoned areas to expedite rapid commercial developments aimed at generating income growth for the country. A feasibility study will be undertaken in 2018 for the development of water and wastewater infrastructure in Savusavu via the grant from the Kuwait Government through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED).

Madam Speaker, to improve its service delivery, WAF has just recently launched its Customer Charter and Liquid Trade Waste Policy, to ensure that all customers from domestic and commercial sectors are fully informed of their rights.

Madam Speaker, WAF in its seven years of existence as a Commercial Statutory Authority (CSA) has gone through some very challenging times, transitioning from a Government Department to a CSA. The WAF inherited a very old and aging infrastructure (Madam Speaker, some of those over 40 years old), very high customer expectations and demands, rapid growth in commercial developments, significant increase in rural–urban migration and a workforce that had limited technical capacity.

Madam Speaker, WAF will set up dedicated business units and appoint specialised personnel to address key focus areas challenging the Authority. This includes the establishment of the Non-Revenue Water Unit aimed at reducing non-revenue water levels to 20 percent by year 2019. To-date, this Unit has reduced the non-revenue water levels from 51.7 percent to 31.3 percent. The 20.4 percent reduction equates to \$13.5 million savings for WAF.

Madam Speaker, WAF is in the process of developing its Disaster Risk Management Plan, especially after the experience of *TC Winston* in February 2016. After *TC Winston*, the Rural Unit has mobilised to the 184 villages across the country and within three to six weeks, were able to restore water in these respective villages. As of today, some of these villages are still being rehabilitated. Approximately 27,000 people will benefit from this rehabilitation programme.

Madam Speaker, in respect of WAF's preparation for climate change and COP23, WAF currently operates 55 Water Treatment Plants, 11 Wastewater Treatment Plants, and climate change has proven to have certain impacts on the water and wastewater systems. High floods, adverse raw water quality and rise of sea levels are some of those factors impacting the water and wastewater systems.

In early 2017, WAF entered as a mentee into a twinning programme with the Asian Development Bank, Sydney Water, Climate Risk, Samoa Water Authority and Water PNG to carry out a qualitative Climate Change Risk Assessment to the organisation's key vulnerability areas, and to develop strategic pathways towards building climate resilient infrastructures, moving into the future.

Madam Speaker, this twinning programme is a three-week programme over twelve months whereby Lidar and Asset Data is submitted to climate risk to be analysed through the climate change tool called Adapt Water which was created for the utilised by Sydney Water to carry out their Qualitative Risk Assessment in 2008.

Madam Speaker, Nadi has been selected as the pilot zone for WAF's Qualitative Risk Assessment due to major climatic events severely damaging WAF's infrastructure in the past. After the pilot project is completed, WAF plans to carry out the same Qualitative Risk Assessment for all its water and wastewater systems around Fiji, to ensure that future investments are developed, with climate change factored as a key parameter in strategic planning.

Madam Speaker, whilst we surge forward in our quest to continue to modernise the economy, create increased economic opportunities and encourage economic development, supply of electricity or rather clean energy is crucial, in the modern world, electricity has become one of the vital components and key driver of economic growth and productivity.

The Government, through the Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA), has been working closely and strategically towards sustainable development of the power infrastructure in order to provide and maintain power supply that is financially viable, economically sound and consistent with the required standards of safety, security and quality of power supply.

Development in power infrastructure has been in the area of increased generation, predominantly through renewable resources. With increased development in economic activity, FEA is also extending its power network infrastructure to cater for the growing demand and also to reach out to more areas, communities and Fijian homes that may not have had electricity in the past.

There have been marked increases in residential customers with the development of new housing subdivisions and the Government's Rural Electrification Programme. The FEA, with the assistance from the Government's Rural Electrification Scheme, has over the years been able to extend its distribution network/grid to the rural remote communities, providing affordable, reliable, modern and sustainable energy services to all Fijians around the country.

Madam Speaker, a total of 40 rural electrification projects were commissioned by FEA in 2016, benefiting a total of 796 households. This is a remarkable achievement, considering that FEA was tied down with repairs and restoration of *TC Winston's* damaged FEA infrastructure for six months of the year. FEA successfully completed 40 rural electrification schemes as of June 2017, which will benefit an additional 991 households.

Madam Speaker, there is a total allocation of \$31.1 million in the 2017-2018 National Budget, to enable FEA to commence design and construction works on a total of 147 rural electrification projects. Those projects will benefit a total of 3,382 households in rural remote locations.

Madam Speaker, some of these major grid extension projects that are planned for are grid extension to:

1. Waiyala Village, Sawene Village, Wema Village, Korovou Village, Nasikawa Village and Keiyasi Settlement;
2. Villages on Mali Island and Vorovoro Island;
3. Lagalaga Settlement in Labasa;
4. Welagi Village, Qila Settlement, Vunidawa Settlement and Nabuloni Village;
5. Solove Village (Stage 1 ) in Seaqaqa; and
6. Nakoroboya Primary School, Nakoroboya Village and Nakoroboya Settlement.

There has been an average annual growth of 2.5 percent in customer connections in the various customer segments over the years.

Madam Speaker, FEA had some 150,724 customer accounts in 2010, which has now grown to 178,875 as at July 2017. This is a substantial increase and directly linked to economic growth and development of the nation.

Madam Speaker, the FEA's power infrastructure sustained extensive damages during *TC Winston*. Those damages included and were not limited to electricity generation assets, transmission

towers and lines, sub-transmission poles and lines and the entire power distribution network around the country, including electricity meters.

Madam Speaker, FEA teams and local contractors worked simultaneously on the transmission, sub-transmission and distribution lines in multiple areas in order to restore power supply. Temporary power structures had been constructed in place of the three fallen towers; one for the Wailoa to Vuda transmission line and two for the Nadarivatu transmission line. Tenders have been called for turnkey design and construction of new permanent steel lattice towers.

Madam Speaker, we acknowledge the assistance and support of the New Zealand Government and the New Zealand High Commission in funding the services of the New Zealand linesmen, and the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) for funding the team from Tonga Power Line. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the Australian Government and the Australian High Commission, for their assistance in facilitating the transfer of the donated items which assisted in fast-tracking the restoration process. FEA had spent an additional expenditure of \$30.1 million towards the restoration of the FEA power infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, we wish to commend all FEA's valued customers and thank them for their understanding, patience and co-operation as FEA went ahead with the process of inspecting, repairing and energising the FEA power system, while simultaneously maintaining the required standards of safety, security and quality of power supply.

Madam Speaker, climate change has become an inevitable component to our lives. I sincerely offer my prayers to all those who have recently been affected by *Hurricane Irma*. We need not look too far to understand and realise the impact of climate change. Fiji, as a nation, has had its fair share of natural disasters and climate change-related challenges. Through the guidance and leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister as the President of COP23, we have a roadmap in place to ensure that we lead the call for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

As a small developing island nation, prone to a lot of natural disasters, we have set ourselves a very stretched and ambitious target to try and meet 99 percent of our electricity needs through renewable energy.

Madam Speaker, the FEA has been trending well with the development of renewable energy projects in the recent past. Some of the recently commissioned renewable energy projects, include the:

1. Nadarivatu Hydroelectric Scheme constructed by the cost of US\$150 million;
2. Wainisavulevu Weir Raising Project, further enhanced at the cost of FJ\$40 million;
3. Somosomo Hydroelectric Project, constructed from grant aid provided by the Chinese Government; and
4. the recently commissioned a 10 megawatts biomass plant developed by an independent power producer from Korea, operating as Nabou Green Energy Limited.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Government through the Climate Change Unit (CCU) in the Ministry of Economy is in process of finalising Fiji's Roadmap in the development of Fiji's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Energy Sector Implementation Roadmap.

Madam Speaker, in the 2017-2018 Budget, the Department of Energy reaffirms Government's commitment in getting every rural Fijian community connected to sustainable, reliable and clean source of electricity. This is reflected in the significant increase in the budget, amounting to \$43 million announced for rural electrification. This is more than doubled the budget provided for

in the 2016-2017 financial year, and will allow Government to reach the furthest of our remote communities and further increase the number of rural Fijian families having access to electricity.

In this Budget, 6,866 more rural Fijian families and schools will be assisted, either through connection to the FEA power network or via the installation of Solar Home Systems. This means, Madam Speaker, that a further 4,286 rural homes will be able to connect to the FEA power, and 2,600 rural homes will be installed with Solar Home Systems which is a clean source of electrification. Madam Speaker, that is a big number. These new connections will increase connection of rural homes to FEA power to more than 27,000 homes and those installed with Solar Home Systems to more than 9,400 homes.

Madam Speaker, Government has again provided a budget of \$5.8 million to continue to work in rehabilitating electricity infrastructure in our cyclone-ravaged communities.

Madam Speaker, Government will look into revamping our biofuel mills in line with the recommendations from a study funded by Global Green Growth Institute. In this regard, a budget of \$200,000 has been provided to allow the implementation of a new public-private-partnership management model at two of our eight mills. This also indicates Government's commitment on the use of renewable fuel for our rural communities.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for your time. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, before I start, I am sad to hear that only two Honourable Members from the other side of the House are standing in the 2018 Elections. To the rest of the Honourable Members, I say good luck to you, and you can come join us.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We, on this side of the House, fight for rights and human rights.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Tell them, tell them!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We fight for the truth.

Talking about rights, the Honourable Koya said that the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji best protects our rights. Now, to the indigenous Honourable Members on the other side, consider this! The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji took away the Great Council of Chiefs. The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji took away our right of prior and informed consent. Think about that!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Does that better protect your rights? Think about it, pray for it!

Madam Speaker, back to His Excellency's Address, looking very broadly at His Excellency the President, I can see that he spoke on the Constitution, the next Elections, the outline of new laws, economic development and other things.

On the Constitution, His Excellency the President said that the Constitution is the supreme law, it has been acclaimed internationally, it accommodates contemporary changes when addressing the past and it gives us a way to live together. But the first question that I want to ask is, whether the 2013 Constitution is the Supreme law. Is it the supreme law?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And the proper question to ask is, is it the real Constitution?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, it is not!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In my humble opinion, I know I am correct, it is not.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is true that we have been using this Constitution in our Election, we conducted the Elections under it and we are running this Parliament under its terms, yes, that is true. In the last three years, we have been using this Constitution to run the Government and its machinery, but in my view, if we put this Constitution through the microscope, the verdict will be that, it is only valid to the extent that it is necessary to run the Government. It is not our real Constitution!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The real Constitution is the 1997 Constitution. Let me repeat that, the real Constitution, Madam Speaker, for this country is the 1997 Constitution!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Hear, hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You might want to ask, why? Because it has our mandate.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It has our mandate! It contained the common will of the people of this country, not the 2013 Constitution.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- No, no!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It does not have any mandate. Did it confer our common will? Nothing!

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji was not only imposed, it is an essential tool for what I call a social engineering programme under what is known as the Sunset Clause conducted by the Government to suppress the rights of the indigenous people of this country and to remove their cultural identity.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- True! True!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is it! That is why it is there.

Madam Speaker, if you look back at the 1997 Constitution, it is also saying that it is the supreme law, so how can this one say supreme and this other one supreme? Only one of them can pass the test.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, we all know that there are two very important High Court decisions and these cases had been stated by the Honourable Bulitavu that confirmed and declare that the 1997 Constitution is supreme.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Absolutely!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And the first case was the case of Koroi which is in 2001, and in that case the decision by the present Chief Justice and the court declared that the 1997 Constitution is a living word, meaning that you cannot destroy it. You can burn it, you can tear it apart but it will not die because it is a living document, it is just like the *Holy Bible*.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You cannot destroy the Bible, you cannot tear it, you cannot burn it, it is a living word of God.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is the same. According to the Courts, that is the same for the 1997 Constitution.

The second case, of course, is the Court of Appeal decision in the Qarase Case in April 2009, we all know. In that case, the Court of Appeal declared that everything that was ever done by this Government from 2007 onwards were totally unlawful. And they have ordered the Government then to immediately take Fiji to a general election under the 1997 Constitution. But we all know what happened. What was the response? The same Government that is here in Parliament today disobeyed the orders of the Court.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And what it did in April 2009, it abrogated the 1997 Constitution.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- They talked about the law.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No! We can all agree here in this House that, that act was totally unlawful. Again, totally unlawful!



(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And you want to come here and talk about the respect for the law and the Constitution, when? Your Government! Shame on you!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The very ones who abrogated the Constitution, disrespect the Court.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I know in my heart ...

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- You know nothing!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ...that the true test for the validity of the 2013 Constitution will come when the FijiFirst Party is removed...

(Laughter)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Soon, soon!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ...from the Government and its machinery. Only then, the people will fairly make their verdict. Now, they cannot because you in control. You do not want that to happen.

Madam Speaker, I know that, that time is coming very soon and it will come in the 2018 Election.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is the time! That is the time! That is God's time. That is the time when we will be removed from the bondage and the shackles of the FijiFirst Party.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That will be the time when God will be here to make Fiji free again.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, one thing that I wish to say here is that, the motive of this Government has been very, very much cynical, it is to use the Constitution with such terms as equality and equal citizenry to suppress the rights of the indigenous people of this country. It is also to use development to pull wool over the eyes of the public and hide its true motive of implementing the Sunset Clause.

Now, talking about the Sunset Clause, His Excellency the President said that the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is able to accommodate contemporary changes in society, while addressing the past. My view is, by these words, I am sure that His Excellency the President was referring to measures in the Constitution to implement the Sunset Clause.

By Sunset Clause, I mean, and I am sorry that the Honourable Attorney-General is not here but he will have the time to look at what I am saying and make an answer to that. The Sunset Clause, these are the various measures that the Honourable Attorney-General has foretold in his thesis, that are necessary to remove our cultural autonomy. And by cultural autonomy, I mean, organisations from the village level, to the *tikina*, to the province and to the Great Council of Chiefs as apex.

The Honourable Attorney-General argues, and if I may quote him:

“Its prolonged continuation will place a stranglehold on the very members it seeks to protect, and it will concomitantly disallow the critical cultural space in which a just, vibrant and coherent nation-state can flourish while embracing diversity.”

Well, good luck to him for his view! But what we object from this side is, when he is implementing this at national level without our consent, without the consent of the people who are affected, namely the indigenous people of this country. And if the indigenous people on that side of the House do not see it, I am not sure what is happening to you. You may not even be indigenous, if you cannot see it.

(Laughter)

We can see it from this side, but you cannot see it from that side, so are you indigenous? Maybe not? Or maybe, you just do not care, but never mine.

The Honourable Attorney-General also argues very forcefully indeed that our cultural autonomy has been the primary source of discrimination and political unrest, having direct links to the 1987 and 2000 *coups*. In my view, Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is part of the Honourable Attorney-General's social engineering programme. It is one measure he has introduced to implement his Sunset Clause to rid Fiji of the *iTaukei* cultural autonomy and suppress indigenous rights, things that he claims to be the source of discrimination and political unrest in Fiji. So, how does the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji implement the Sunset Clause and remove cultural autonomy and indigenous rights?

To answer this question, Madam Speaker, we should look at the Wakaya Letter and the 1970 and the 1997 Constitution that entrenched cultural autonomy and indigenous rights, and then we look at how this has been removed by the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji purposely.

Madam Speaker, Indigenous Fijians coming out of the Deed of Cession and the benevolence of the Crown as protector of their paramount rights and interests were totally comfortable with the Crown Colony. But, forced with international pressure for independence, the chiefs expressed in so-called Wakaya letter their conditions for self-government to be guaranteed under any Constitution that came after that and it was there in the 1970 and 1997 Constitutions. So what are these conditions? There were four conditions that included the:

1. Need to maintain Crown as Head of the State; and
2. The need to entrench prior and informed consent before any changes made to legislations affecting them.

Both the 1970 and 1997 Constitutions faithfully kept to those conditions which were expressed in the Wakaya letter.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me teach you now. Look at the 1997 Constitution, the Crown is no more.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But the Great Council of Chiefs has been brought in to look after our best interests. You go and look at your laws in Section 116 of that Constitution.

HON. MEMBER.- Who took away the Crown?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Section 116(1) states, and I quote: “The *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* established under the Fijian Affairs Act continues in existence...”, so it is there. Then the GCC’s constitutional function, more than that, it has a constitutional role and constitutional function which includes the appointment of the President of the Republic of Fiji.

Indigenous rights of prior and informed consent before any changes to legislations affecting them was there, Section 185, which we call the entrenched provision.

Now, we take a look at the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. What has it done? You only need to read Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum’s thesis to see that the very purpose of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is designed to remove all semblance of indigenous rights, cultural autonomy and cultural identity.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Do you want me to say that again?

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Look at it! The GCC that was there in Section 116 of the 1997 Constitution and its central role in the state of appointing the President has been totally removed.

All entrenchment to guarantee prior and.....

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Listen to this. All entrenchment to guarantee prior and informed consent that were there in Section 185 of the 1997 Constitution has been totally removed. All references to Christianity and its contribution had been removed. All policies that were introduced to guarantee a fair and equal employment opportunity amongst the races has been totally removed.

Madam Speaker, let me make a few comments about ethnicity or more the fear of ethnicity by that side of the House. Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President said, and I quote “... this election must be contested over policies, over the future, not ethnicity...” That statement, in my belief, the President extenuates the Government’s fear of ethnicity. But should it be?

Ethnicity or any reference or statement is now taboo. It is a sin for the Government to be saying this, and Government says that the word conjures racism, discrimination, ethnic divide and inequality. Government is saying "equal citizenry and merit is a seal that binds." But we know with history as our guide that the failure to properly address ethnicity resulted in the death of five million Jews in the Second World War, the failure to properly address ethnicity resulted in the bloodbath and conflict between the *Hutus* and the *Tutsis*, the failure to properly address ethnicity even closer to home was a result of the conflict of the *Malaitans* in Guadalcanal. Even here in Fiji, we can fairly say that the 1987 and 2000 *coups* were the result of past government's failure to address the imbalance of opportunities and benefits as a consequence of ethnicity.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- When the current Government boasted to the UN Human Rights Committee (CERD) in 2012 of Fiji's new dawn under a new Constitution that guarantees equality under equal citizenry, the response from the UN is this, "Give us the statistics to show equal distribution of wealth", and the Government has never honoured that, even to the extent in 2016 of the Special Rapporteur coming here to remind the Government once again, "Give us the statistics." Do you know what the statistics will show – a great imbalance? That is what will happen when you take ethnicity out of the equation of any government programme.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, now I wish to talk about economic development. A lot has been said about economic development and His Excellency the President had said that he is proud of our economic expansion, sound economic policy and planning, but the truth is, Madam Speaker, is that this Government is guilty of neglect, is guilty mismanagement of taxpayers' money even collusion and possible corruption. Let me outline some examples.

Madam Speaker, \$96.4 million remain unaccounted by the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs to the taxpayers of this country. This is the cumulative total of public money paid out that the Ministry has failed to account to the people of this country going back to 1998 - \$96.4 million. Do you want to hear that again? \$96.4 million unaccounted.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- For 2016 alone, the unaccounted sum was \$3.2 million. It is a pure sign of mismanagement and the Auditor-General had to declare this, and I quote him, "In the absence of timely submission of the annual accounts for audit, there is a risk that funds provided by the Ministry are not being utilised for its intended purpose."

Madam Speaker, in 2016, the Auditor-General found with regards to the Ministry of Economy that the negligence of its officers resulted in the wastage of public funds amounting to about \$50,000. The negligence was in handling of a consignment of medicine from the Fiji Pharmaceutical Services. The container containing the consignments sat at the Bonding Area for 253 days – neglect. What were you doing - 253 days, doing nothing?

Madam Speaker, \$26 million in arrears is sitting with the Ministry of Lands.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You better hear this - \$26 million in arrears, instead of giving money out, it would have been better for the Honourable Minister for Lands to go back to his Ministry

and look at this \$26 million in arrears is still sitting with the Ministry of Lands with the amount increasing daily despite the fact that they established a special Task Force in 2008. It is nearly 10 years now but the arrears is still growing.

Madam Speaker, in 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture wasted taxpayers' money in the sum of \$13,000 simply because he decided to pull out two of its officers unnecessarily from attending a very useful conference at the very last moment. The two officers were ordered to accompany the Honourable Prime Minister to the North and as a result they wasted \$13,000 - can you pay for that?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is not your money, that is not your father's money, that is the taxpayers' money.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, \$9.6 million of taxpayers' money in capital grants given to Agro Marketing Authority remain unaccounted to this day, as I speak.

Madam Speaker, \$0.5 million was diverted by the Ministry of Agriculture without authority for money that was allocated for the coconut industry. No authority. Again, Madam Speaker, \$25 million of taxpayers' money fund is still unaccounted by the Ministry of Tourism and Trade. This is the money that was paid to Fiji Tourism. The Minister for Trade has not accounted it to this House and to the public.

Madam Speaker, \$20 million was abused by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. This money was taken out from donor fund and was distributed by the Ministry to individuals who were not victims of the cyclone. The Auditor-General found, and I quote:

“No Cabinet decision or approval made, payment was made to recipients of Social Protection Programme regardless of whether they were affected by *Tropical Cyclone Winston* or not.”

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Vote buying, vote buying.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is not my word, this is the Auditor-General speaking. To save them, they told the Auditor-General to retract, how can you do that?

(Laughter)

The Auditor-General, Madam Speaker, is a holy grail of the yardstick that we measure the Government by. You do not retract that, you never ever do that, please.

I wish to say something here, Madam Speaker, about *Cyclone Winston*. Madam Speaker, I visited 20 villages in about five to three weeks ago and I can tell you, materials lying about in the villages, no carpenters today, they are still there.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mataiasia Niumataiwalu.

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Good morning, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of

Parliament, ladies and gentlemen. Madam Speaker, I rise to add my sentiments in congratulating His Excellency the President, Major General (Retired) Jioji Konrote for his gracious Speech on the Opening of the 2017-2018 Parliament Session.

I would like to focus on two aspects of His Excellency's speech this morning - Climate Change and the Constitution. Climate change is dear to my heart because the villages of my island of Nayau in Lau had to relocate because of *Cyclone Meli*. It not only devastated but took 11 lives from a total of 50 in 1979; that was 38 years ago.

However, Madam Speaker, let me begin by reading excerpts from His Excellency's Speech on 4th September, 2017 in this august House, and I quote:

“The Honourable Prime Minister is the President of what is known as COP23, aided by the Minister for Agriculture, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu, who serves as High Level Climate Champion and Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan, who serves as Climate Negotiator. These demanding roles require an in-depth knowledge of the technical, political and economic issues in combating climate change,”

Madam Speaker, last week as we gathered for the Opening of Parliament, the 48th Pacific Islands Forum was held in Apia, Samoa from 5<sup>th</sup>-8th September, 2017 and was attended by Heads of States, Governments and Territories from Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Republic of Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Nauru, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The Republic of Palau was represented by their Vice-President; the Republic of Fiji was represented by the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security; New Zealand, by the Minister for Foreign Affairs; and Niue, the Minister for Social Services

Madam Speaker, in their communiqué, the leaders acknowledged Fiji's five key priorities for COP23 Presidency, namely:

1. Facilitative dialogue;
2. The implementation guidelines and the Paris Agreement Rulebook;
3. Gender local communities and indigenous peoples platform;
4. Adaptation, loss and damage; and
5. Oceans pathway through 2020 that strengthens the ocean climate change nexus.

The leaders recognised the unique opportunity at the 23rd Conference of the Parties (COP23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change provides to the Pacific, building up on the outcome of the UN Ocean Conference and expressed their support towards Fiji's COP23 Presidency.

Recognising the significant vulnerability of forum island countries to the adverse impacts of climate change, these leaders call for urgent ambitious action from the global community to address climate change including the provision of finance to implement the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) finalising the Paris Agreement Guidelines by 2018 and launching an inclusive process to elaborate the facilitative dialogue.

Madam Speaker, the leaders tasked the Forum Secretariat to co-ordinate in consultation with members the work of CROP agencies in preparations leading up to COP23 in Bonn, Germany. The leaders agreed to remain fully engaged in the upcoming regional and global preparatory meeting,

including the pre-COP meeting to be held in Nadi from 17th October, 2017. The Pacific Health Ministers meeting in the Cook Islands have also given their support to Fiji's Presidency of COP23.

To spice things up, a US Senate Committee votes to reinstate funding to UN Climate Treaty. This is great news. Despite withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. The US Senate this month went against the wishes of President Trump and restored funding to the UN Climate Treaty. The Committee passed an amendment to give \$10 million to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, an organisation Donald Trump wants to cut-off.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency said, and I quote:

“We have seen time and again that small island states and developing countries are not the only ones vulnerable to the severe storms that are surely influenced by global warming. The mighty city of Houston, with some six million people in its metropolitan area, has been paralysed by *Hurricane Harvey* and is facing years of recovery, even with the vast resources of the United States of America.

It is not only Fijian villagers who will be forced to move to higher ground away from the coast. It is not only the poor in India and Bangladesh who could be uprooted. They may be joined by wealthy Americans in Miami or Houston or even New York.”

Category 5 hurricanes have devastated other nations in the Caribbean last week and this week. Our thoughts and prayers are with those suffering in the Caribbean and the United States of America today.

Madam Speaker, COP23 in Bonn is expected to bring together over 50,000 people. You can just imagine Fiji sitting at the top table amongst leaders from 197 nations. The nation needs to unite under the Honourable Prime Minister's leadership of COP23.

(Applause)

Madam Speaker, we need to seize this moment. This time will never come back for Fiji. I welcome the Honourable Prime Minister's call for prayers for COP23. There are certain things in life that can only be tackled by Divine Intervention of the Almighty. The FijiFirst acknowledges that we need God to be part of this picture. God Almighty is the Creator of the world and He instructed Adam in the *Bible* to tend the garden as it says in Genesis, in other words to look after our environment.

We have not been good stewards of what the Creator has given us.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- His Excellency also highlighted the significance of the Fijian Constitution. He said, and I quote:

“The Constitution gives us a way to live together, to govern and to make decisions. In other words, it expects us to make informed decisions and settle disputes in a respectful way.”

Allow me to paraphrase, the Constitution allows us or gives us fellow Fijians a level playing field or platform to agree to disagree.

Madam Speaker, I speak this passage of His Excellency's Speech and bring it down to the home-front. Everything begins at home whilst we are rebuilding stronger schools and homes following *Cyclone Winston*, we also need to build stronger from within. Right moral structures need to be put in place with strong foundational principles that will stand the test of time. Nehemiah 2:18 in the *Holy Bible* says: "Thou they said, "Let us rise up and build. Then they set their hands to do this good work."

Madam Speaker, when we read the book of Nehemiah in the *Bible*, you see a story of a man called to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem, walls that had been torn down and burned by the enemies. The task was an awesome one, almost an impossible one. There were many who opposed the work, many who ridiculed Nehemiah and those he rallied to rebuild. Families were placed along the wall rebuilding their portion and totally devoted to the work of rebuilding. Today, the wall of protection afforded by strong families in each of our cities, towns, settlements and villages have been destroyed.

Madam Speaker, in Nehemiah's days, families stood side by side to rebuild each at their apportioned post doing their portion of the work. Today, it is also true that strong families bring strength to the city. Strong families provide corporate protection for our cities. Homes that are in ruin leave our cities vulnerable to various types of attack. The walls composed of strong families provide protection and our children have a safe place in which to dwell.

Our moral values through the Word of God provides boundaries, and as the standard that provides protection is raised, the boundaries it provides are also put in place. Many today want protection but shun the boundaries.

Madam Speaker, as I bring it home this morning, I would like to highlight what a good friend of mine shared. Here is what he said and I quote:

"Yesterday, two friends of mine were reflecting on the current state of politics in the country. The discussion ranged from the good things that Government have done to the things that remained questionable. The Opposition's contribution was also discussed about whether they have been an effective alternative Government or not. Like any citizen, we all gave our two cent worth and it was an interesting outlay of thoughts. We didn't allow the discussions to overwhelm us and most especially to not leave a negative taste at the end of it."

So, this morning as I read St. Paul's letter to the Romans, I was confronted with His word in Romans and it was about submission to authorities. St. Paul put it rather bluntly. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. He who rebels against authority, rebels against what God has instituted."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Does this have to do with the favour of God? I do not know. What I do know is that the mind of Christ is deeper and who knows the mind of Christ except those who take on that mind-set is what St. Paul writes too.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Well after this revelation, I am sorry to put this bluntly too but the natural man (our own mind-set) does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God



for they are foolishness to the natural man and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

St. Paul adds further "Give everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes: if revenue, pay revenue; if respect, then respect, if honour then honour." - Romans 13:6. Then he starts to reveal the basis of this godly advice. The whole aspect of submission is an act of love. The love of Christ, the motivation is love based, love is the fulfilment of law. St. Paul goes further to demonstrate how love fulfils the law. He says: "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love another for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" So according to his Word, I must support the Government because they are the governing authority. It has nothing to do with my voting them into power or not, or whether I agree with their policies or not or whether I dislike the personalities or not, it does not matter as far as the Word is concerned. The motivation from my submission must remain always under the banner of His love, whether it is an *iTaukei* led-Government or an Indo-Fijian led-Government, or a *Kailoma* led-Government, whatever tag you might want to put on it, if it is the government that governs, I am compelled by His Word to submit.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- So, if this Government changes next year as a result of the elections, I must then submit to the next. If this Government should continue, I must continue to do so. Nothing must deter the call of God in our lives to submit. If my contribution as a citizen is not motivated by the love of Christ, then I no longer am a disciple of Christ. For then, it is no longer Christ that liveth in me. In the final analysis, St Paul concludes that each of us (including governments of this world) will give account of ourselves to God. There is some food for thought therefore anyone of us who think we can get away with doing things our own way. Well folks, all I can say is that I was happy to be corrected by the Word of the Lord. This is what I love about the Word of God. The Word always offer a plumb-line approach. If we are not in line with the Word, it does not matter how strongly we might feel about our own opinion, it is still outside of God's viewpoint." That was what my friend shared.

May the Lord Jesus bless all Fijians and bless our Honourable Prime Minister in his tenure as President of COP23.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I fully endorse and support His Excellency the President in his most gracious Speech.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Alexander O'Connor.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery and those watching from the comforts of their home or through the internet: A very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate and thank His Excellency the President for his great vision, courage, leadership, strong commitment towards the development of our beloved nation.

His Excellency the President mentioned in his Opening Address, and I quote:

"There will be a number of legal reforms, commercial reforms, and reforms to spur and improve development and encourage business, and provide commercial and finance opportunities for all Fijians."

His Excellency then went on to confirm that, and I quote:

“Parliament will deal with changes in public health protection and quarantine.”

Madam Speaker, the common definition of “public health”, as I am sure we all know, is the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting human health through organised efforts and the informed choices of society, organisations, public and private communities and individuals.

The focus of public health interventions can be as small as a handful of people, or as large as the entire population of Fiji. Indeed, we consider threats to public health such as pandemics and the impact of climate change, our focus necessarily expands to become regional or possibly even global and the term “human health” is defined much more broadly than just absence of disease. According to the World Health Organisation, it is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

The scope of public health activities is thus equally broad. They may cover epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, mental health and occupational health and safety, to name just a handful.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services undertakes an extensive range of public health activities aimed at protecting and promoting good health. Examples include the promotion of hand washing, support for breastfeeding, vaccination programmes and suicide prevention campaigns.

Measures such as these have contributed greatly to the health of population and increases in life expectancy here and around the world. Indeed, it has been argued by researchers that most of the increase in life expectancy across the world over the last two hundred years was attributable to better control of infectious diseases, more abundant and safer foods, better sanitary conditions, and other non-medical social improvements. That is a clear demonstration of power, impact and importance of public health.

Madam Speaker, the Public Health Act, which underpins many of our activities in the field of public health came into law on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1936. It has just passed its 81<sup>st</sup> birthday. There have obviously been many amendments over that time but much of the Act still has echoes of the past. There are references to “privies” - an old-fashioned term for lavatories which I for one have not heard since my childhood.

The Act refers to people suffering from “loathsome diseases” and specifically highlights “consumption” which *Wikipedia* tell us was the “most common nineteenth century English word for tuberculosis.” It even dictates how many coats of paint should be applied to the walls of a bakery as well as how often the walls should be washed and how often they should be re-painted.

I am sure Honourable Members are aware of the dangers of mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue, *zika* and *chikungunya*. You may also, therefore, be surprised to learn that the maximum penalty that can be applied under the Public Health Act for failing to take steps to prevent the spread of mosquitoes or even for encouraging them to breed is just \$10.

Clearly, the Act is unsuitable for a modern, aspiring country such as Fiji. The need for it to be updated is long overdue, and I am pleased to recognise His Excellency's clear commitment for that to happen. The Public Health Protection Bill that the FijiFirst Government plans to introduce to the House will be fit-for-purpose. It will ensure that risks to public health can be effectively managed

and it will also be sufficiently flexible to allow government to respond quickly and effectively to any unanticipated threats.

As recent experiences with *SARS*, *Ebola* and *Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome* have shown, new diseases can emerge and spread at frightening speed in today's modern, interconnected world. We need to have at our disposal both the clinical and the regulatory tools needed to safeguard our population.

At the same time, we must recognise that over-complex legislation which places unreasonable demands on the public and businesses can stand in the way of economic growth. While protecting health must always be our priority, there are other factors that also need to be considered. Work on the new Bill is well-advanced. The World Health Organisation is working alongside staff from the Ministry and international expert advisors to finalise the drafting and I am confident it will soon be ready for this House to consider.

The Bill, once passed, will help to ensure that all Fijians are better protected from a wide range of current and future risks to their health and can go about their lives in an environment which is not only safer but also cleaner and greener. Madam Speaker, maintaining a clean, green environment is a key goal of public health but one of the main threats that we currently face in terms of our aspiration for such a clean, green environment is indiscriminate, inappropriate and indeed illegal disposal of garbage, littering and dumping of commercial and trade wastes.

I am sure I speak for all Members of this House when I express my dismay at the way our streets, our parks and public areas, our beaches and our foreshores are disfigured by rubbish. That is surely not the image we wish to convey to our overseas visitors, or the memory of Fiji we would want them to take home with them, but rubbish is not an eyesore. It can also pose a very real threat to health. Old car and truck tyres that gather water are well-known to be a favoured haunt of disease carrying mosquitoes. Rubbish in the wrong places can pollute water sources, it provides a fertile breeding ground for harmful bacteria and it attracts vermin which are themselves carriers of infectious organisms.

The new Public Health Protection Bill will address this, including the introduction of the capability to impose severe spot fines as an immediate deterrent to offenders.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency also referred to new quarantine regulation. Isolation and quarantine are public health practices that are critical in limiting the spread of severe diseases by preventing exposure to infected persons or to persons who may be affected.

Quarantine is also a powerful tool to prevent the introduction of communicable diseases from foreign countries. The existing Quarantine Act came into force in 1965 and is another piece of legislation that is long overdue for renewal. In particular, it needs to be brought into line with the International Health Regulations, an important global agreement which came into force ten years ago and to which Fiji is a signatory.

An updated Act will also strengthen Fiji's health security measures by establishing more effective networks with other border control agencies in support of surveillance and monitoring programmes at international ports of entry to minimise the risk of human and vector-borne diseases coming into Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I have spoken about two important legislative changes that were highlighted by His Excellency during his Address to this House. Those changes are long overdue and it is to the credit of the current Government that they are now taking place.

As the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services herself stated on Monday, and I quote:

“We will seek to ensure that our legislation in those crucial areas is consistent with contemporary best practice and protects the health of our population while minimising the regulatory burden on our society”.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to convey to the House some details of the Ministry's work to protect and promote the health and well-being of our fellow Fijians. I am also grateful to be able to explain to Honourable Members and to the public who may be listening and watching that a modern health system encompasses much more than the services we rely on when we are sick and injured.

If is often said that a good health system should focus on building a strong fence on the top of the cliff rather than placing ambulances at the bottom. In Fiji, we are fortunate that our population is well-served by the fence of effective public health measures but also well cared for, should they need support at the bottom of the cliff of ill health.

Madam Speaker, I am committed to working alongside the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services in delivering the vision of a healthier, happier Fiji in which no one is left behind and, with those words, I commend His Excellency's Address to this noble House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. We will now suspend the House for refreshments and resume at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.00 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.33 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will resume from where we left off and I now invite the Honourable Howard Politini to take the floor.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- The Honourable Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament and my fellow countrymen and women: *Bula vinaka*.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech, delivered at the Opening of Parliament on 4th September, 2017. I rise in support of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, without question the most important single document in the Fiji Law and one that the FijiFirst Government is rightly proud to have created.

The FijiFirst Government has recognised the need for the existing Constitution of 1997 to be reviewed and for a new one to be passed into law through Parliament, and we spent a very long time in the preparation and review process, including widespread consultation with all sectors of the Fijian population. Advice was sought from experts in many disciplines to ensure that the changes were only brought to law after Parliament was convinced that every requirement had been fulfilled.

The overriding objective of the review and subsequent redrafting of this critical document had one overriding objective, to ensure that no Fijians were left behind as Fiji develops and progresses into the future, that every Fijian was treated equally and there was no disadvantage to any minority group.

One of the reasons the 1977 Fiji Constitution needed to be updated was that it perpetuated injustices that affected certain citizens based on issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, community location, access to education and other services and guarantees of personal security.

Madam Speaker, I can assure you that in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, as it was finally passed into law by this Parliament, is regarded as one of the finest and most inclusive in the world, where there are many fine constitutions governing the lives of different countries. This high regard is not limited to within Fiji, but is openly displayed throughout the world.

I have recently returned from attending the World Parliamentary Seminar on Sustainable Development Goals, sponsored by the United Nations, and involving many different countries from the developing world, and I can assure you that the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji answers all of the 17 major goals set out under the United Nations Charters for Sustainable Development Goals.

Madam Speaker, the constitution of any country is the most important law in the country and is critical to the governing of the population as it is the basis of every other law. So, clearly the quality of life, the economic power, the personal security of each person and the certainty that justice will prevail for every citizen is embedded in each country's constitution.

Last week, in a media interview about the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, one of Fiji's most respected constitutional lawyers made the clearest statement on the important power any constitution had in the community. I paraphrase the comments that a country's constitution is the foundation on which all other laws are founded, setting the rules for governing the country, directing what Parliament can do in all areas of legal activity and limiting the powers of Parliament to act only in those areas.

It is the guarantee that laws will be stable, predictable and reasonable and that the rights of every citizen are protected. The constitution provides certainty for every citizen of the country that they will be protected and treated equally with every other citizen.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji addresses every issue affecting the lives of the citizens and gives clear guidance on how issues are to be resolved, directs the lines of authority to ensure that due process is consistently followed and that all actions are clear, transparent and accountable. This provides absolute equality under the law.

To make this equality available to every Fijian, the FijiFirst Government has expanded the Legal Aid service to provide free advice and assistance to anyone who is unable to afford the professional fees, correcting the past situation where the wealthy had a distinct advantage under the law.

In the past, many aspects of lives of Fiji citizens were controlled or dictated by their race or gender but the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji sets out very clear and transparent guidelines to eliminate the issue of the race or gender of a citizen being considered in any aspect of the law, and goes even further to make it illegal for these to be involved in any decisions of law, or any other sections of community life.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji definitely declares Fiji as a secular state and it does this to ensure that there is absolute freedom for any citizen to follow their chosen spiritual life, and to ensure that their spiritual beliefs are not used to influence the governance of the country or for larger groups of a particular spiritual belief to apply undue pressure against minorities. This is done to protect the rights of citizens to follow their chosen spiritual direction, without the fear of disadvantage or persecution because of that choice.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji also sets out clearly what quality of life rights each citizen has and how these rights will be protected by the Government so that every citizen has equal access through those rights. These rights include access to services such as reliable electricity, safe drinking water, roads and transport, education, health services and many other issues that contribute to acceptable standard of living. The role of the Government is defined and controlled and limits are set to establish acceptable minimums.

The right to education is also guaranteed in the Constitution and our Government has developed policies and programmes to ensure that these rights are available to everyone. We have made education free up to the completion of high school, including free transport and meal support where required and have put in place a school building programme and measures to ensure that the teaching standards are equal across all schools. To assist those students who are financially constrained in entering tertiary programmes, we have developed student loan schemes, scholarship programmes and other forms of assistance.

Our Government is committed to making it possible for every student to reach their full potential and for those who wish to follow careers in the trade areas, we have created strong and diverse technical education sectors to provide opportunities for them to follow their chosen path.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution also provides the equal access for every citizen, regardless of where they live, to health services and our Government has put in place health programmes that open up medical services throughout Fiji, provide increases in the number of doctors, nurses and specialists in a wide range of health services. To back this increase in locations, a number of new health facilities are being built or existing ones upgraded.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji also recognises the right of citizen to live without fear for their personal security and addresses the role of the disciplined services: the Police Force and the Military Force - their operations and accountability.

The rights of the *i-Taukei*, their traditional and land ownerships are also recognised and expressly addressed to ensure that their concerns and fears in these areas of their lives is addressed.

The Constitution, Madam Speaker, also guarantees the right to economic security for every citizen and to assist in the achievement of this rights, the FijiFirst Government has introduced an extensive system of support and development for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), with the aim of taking a significant number of job seekers into their own businesses and becoming creators of jobs for others. These programmes have seen significant success and have spread economic security into many sectors where it was lacking.

The FijiFirst Government, Madam Speaker, has also set policies in place to have created confidence in the Fiji business community, greatly increasing private sector investment and local production that has led to eight years of continuous economic growth, unprecedented by Fiji's business history, economic growth which has assisted in the delivery of the right of economic security for all citizens.

To add to that, Madam Speaker, as stated previously, we also have our National Development Plan, while there been some unforeseen delays, the Honourable Prime Minister will launch it before Pre-COP23.

As direct result of benefits achieved by all citizens by the implementation of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the standing of Fiji has risen dramatically and Fiji now takes its place in line with the leading nations in the world. Fiji played a significant role in the Paris Accord on Climate Change, where the first real agreement on activity to mitigate the effects and damage and the possibility of reversing the problems was achieved.

Fiji was selected to provide leadership of the UN General Assembly with Fiji's Ambassador to the UN being elected President and our Honourable Prime Minister was asked to take the Presidency of COP23, taking the world leaders to the next level of the Paris Accord. The leaders of the world's most powerful nations have seen fit to visit Fiji and put in place specific programmes to ensure our continued economic growth and the World Bank has acknowledged the effectiveness of the programmes that have been initiated by our Government because of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji by lifting Fiji's credit rating.

Madam Speaker, if there is any question about the power of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, all one has to do is to look at the fruit it is producing for the citizens of our beautiful country.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, to conclude, I finally support His Excellency the President Speech and I thank you for your indulgence, *vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech. I continue to hope against hope that those on the Government side would also aspire to some level of graciousness. This would befit the Government that claims to lead our country for the benefit of everyone. This opening Session of Parliament should be an opportunity for the Government to outline its policies and plans. Instead, it engages in petty politics and attacks on its opponents.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We are flattered by the attention the Government is giving us in its attacks over the last two days, particularly the mover of the motion, the Honourable Prime Minister. Let me assure him, we fear no one; we will not be intimidated; and if we are attacked, we will return fire with intensity and interest.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, the National Federation Party (NFP) has been around for 54 years. The tree of the NFP has unshakable foundations and deep roots in the community. It has never sacrificed its democratic principles to grab power from others. And it has watched other political parties ride high after military *coups*, only to dissolve into nothing when they fall from grace.

This too will be the way of the FijiFirst party, Madam Speaker. It has no ideology, no principles and no history. It was born holding political power. It has never had to work hard to earn the people's respect and support.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It has two leaders who will not share power even with their own team. Its Members are interested only in what they can get from the Government and when it loses power, the FijiFirst Party will fade away.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I expected the Honourable Prime Minister, as mover of the motion to set the right tone to the debate in the spirit of His Excellency's Address, particularly his emphasis on unity, togetherness and marching forward in unison, shoulder to shoulder without rancour, as we present ourselves before the electorate in the lead-up to the 2018 General Elections. But all we have heard from the Government side is that the FijiFirst Party is the only saviour for our beloved nation and no other party has the ability to move Fiji forward.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister based his supposedly sure-shot confidence of securing the next Elections in his favour on two things:

- i) The so-called patriotism of his team; and
- ii) Fighting the Elections with his right-hand man beside him, the Honourable Attorney General.

The first pair ever to be called the 'Dynamic Duo' ...



(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... were the famous movie action here, "Batman" and his sidekick, Robin. We would all do well to remember that the batman movies were works of fiction, a bit like most of what you read in the *Fiji Sun*.

However, Madam Speaker, I agree with both the Honourable Prime Minister and His Excellency's call for Elections to be free of any campaigning based on ethnicity, race and religion. They have no place in a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. They are inflammatory. Election campaigns should be about a battle of ideas, policies and objectives for the advancement of one and all in our nation. We, in the NFP, Madam Speaker, will do exactly this, and we did in 2014. But, Madam Speaker, I remind the Honourable Prime Minister that the Elections campaign should also not be based on fear-mongering.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I will wait for the Honourable Attorney General to finish.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am talking to the leader.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, as I said, I remind the Honourable Prime Minister that the Elections campaign should also not be about fear-mongering.

It should not be about current FijiFirst Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers telling Indo-Fijians that their security is guaranteed only under the current Government. Yes, Madam Speaker, the NFP know exactly what you are saying because the people are telling us. You cannot say on the one hand that campaigning should be free of appeals to race when this is what you are saying in the community.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is shameful and despicable. It is similar to their leader.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I will stop again.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is similar to their Leader and the Honourable Prime Minister telling Parliament that they are the only ones qualified to lead Fiji into the future. Madam Speaker, this shows the fear Government has about losing the Elections.

Elections for them are only about how they can buy their way back to power, privileges, ministerial salaries and big travel allowances. Elections are not about winning and losing, Madam Speaker. Elections are about ensuring that that the people have a voice in Parliament, as we have today.

HON. MEMBER.- They have now.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, even those who not vote for the FijiFirst Party or another party and it is up to whoever is in Government to work with everyone in Parliament ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what we do!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...to achieve the best results.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what we do!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A party like FijiFirst, born from a military dictatorship cannot understand that, and that is truly, Madam Speaker, Fiji's loss and I personally have been calling on the Government to show bi-partisanship, work with the Opposition on matters of national interest.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency spoke about Government's track record. So, did the Honourable Prime Minister say it was 10 years of progress for Fiji? Therefore, for all intents and purposes, the Honourable Prime Minister takes pride in governing the nation since the *coup* of December, 2006.

Now what is the track record?

1. For the last three days, the focus by Government Members has been on eight years of so-called economic growth. Madam Speaker, I repeat what I said in Parliament on 11th July, 2017 during the debate on the 2017-2018 Budget: "Government has effectively presided over an economy built on tourism, government spending and overseas remittances. This is an economic vision that requires zero imagination."
2. The Sugar Industry is struggling for survival. On 30th September, the European Union sugar production quota will also end. No solution is in sight. All we hear is that the Fiji Sugar Corporation will pre-sell sugar. The Honourable Prime Minister rejected our repeated calls for bipartisanship to collectively overcome the challenges faced by the industry. Yet, Government is wandering aimlessly to find solutions.
3. Government kicked out our petition to rebuild the Penang Sugar Mill. Another petition seeking the implementation of a minimum guaranteed price of \$100 per tonne was disallowed from being tabled in Parliament.
4. Government has repeatedly rejected the Opposition's motion to increase allocation for kidney dialysis from the meagre \$300,000 it used to allocate.
5. Government betrayed its 2014 Elections promise not to impose VAT on seven basic food items by re-imposing 9 percent VAT from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016, as well as imposing VAT on prescription medication.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-

6. Our public hospitals have become a blight on the nation, even the free medicine subsidy is shambolic.

7. The minimum wage has been increased from \$2.32 to \$2.68, while hefty salaries for the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Cabinet Ministers were prescribed through a Decree three days before the start of the 2014 Parliament, Madam Speaker, we must remember that.
8. The allowances of Office holders and all Parliamentarians were unethically and massively increased last year when Fiji was reeling from the effects of severe *TC Winston*.
9. The Parliamentary Standing Orders were changed to remove the provisions of an Opposition Member chairing the all-important Public Accounts Committee. The Government has now reached the point where it is prepared to bully the Auditor-General into admitting so-called "errors" in his reporting. These were not errors, they were just facts that the Government did not like, Madam Speaker. It is not about when the Ministry of Economy starts sitting with the Auditor-General during their press conference.
10. The Open Merit Recruitment System is a farce, as seen in the review of salaries of teachers, downgrading of substantive positions to acting appointments and bonding them into a contract.
11. This Government wants to impose village-by-laws and enact the Rotuma Land Bill, I see they are retracting on the Village By-Laws.

Madam Speaker, what I have just outlined is a sample of a scorecard of the FijiFirst Government. To put it simply, this is a control freak government. If there was substantial evidence of this before, the scripted speeches of Government Members, all pre-approved by the Honourable Attorney-General, prove this beyond any doubt.

So what do we do Madam Speaker? Team NFP has practical, sound and sensible solutions. I write it myself. In Government we will implement them to improve the livelihood of all our people. His Excellency implored upon us to campaign on issues and this is what we will do.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Therefore, we will:

1. As soon as possible call a National Economic Summit to ensure that the people work together to find solutions to ensure economic growth benefits every citizen of our nation;
2. Immediately reduce the salaries and allowances of the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Cabinet Ministers by 25 per cent, repeal the Parliamentary Remunerations Decree and through Parliament appoint an independent Emoluments Committee to ensure there is relativity in the salaries. The Government is paying its Ministers obscene amounts of money while some of its people continue to live in tents after *TC Winston*;

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-

3. Implement a minimum guaranteed price of \$100 per tonne of cane to give confidence in our cane growers and provide them incentives to increase production, with the

objective of achieving the desired target of 4 million tonnes of cane and 400,000 tonnes of sugar;

4. Build a new sugar mill in Rakiraki to ensure the survival of the local economy of Ra;
5. Repeal the Village-by-laws and the Rotuma Land Bill and instead begin a proper process of consultation with the indigenous and Rotuman people on their leadership and institutions at local and at international levels;
6. Establish and fully resource a National Hospital Service that will be fully responsible for all aspects of public health care, including implementation of a better free medicines scheme;

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-

7. Zero rate or make VAT, (this is not a laughing matter) zero rate and make VAT free 15 food items, including review on duties on them to cushion the impact of rising cost of living. I can guarantee that one of the food items whose duty will be reduced and made VAT free will be lamb products like lamb chops, lamb shank and lamb neck;

(Laughter)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Because this is what they campaign for.

8. We will ensure our civil servants and teachers are given permanent employment and increase their retirement age to 60 years;
9. We will allocate \$5 million for kidney dialysis; and
10. We will implement a phase in living wage of \$5 an hour for our unskilled workers and all those wage earners earning less than this rate.

Madam Speaker, Government has publicly stated that a living wage is unaffordable and will result in job losses, this is complete nonsense. You look at the literature, in many countries where minimum living wages has been increased, there has never been a wholesale loss of jobs as this argument by Government is nonsense.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We have to get the incomes of our poorest people in Fiji up to acceptable levels. This is not just about basic fairness and decency, this about ensuring that people can participate in the economy, send their children to school, and pay their rent and their water bills. If people cannot participate in the economy, then they are alienated and angry, then Madam Speaker, we have severe problems and inequality.

Even the Government understands this, they understand this, but their solution is to run around the country handing out millions of dollars for so-called "Small Enterprise Grants" without actually knowing or caring how this money is spent, they do not have any idea.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, the Government has made a big deal about the increase in the minimum wage. Here, I refer to the recent statement by the Honourable Minister for Employment who claims that the new minimum wage rate of \$2.68 per hour will benefit 150,000 workers in the informal sector.

But after the Government cut income taxes again in the last Budget, what is the new minimum wage rate of a Cabinet Minister? People need to know this, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

A worker on the minimum wage will earn, after FPNP is paid, about \$111 per week.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- On the other hand, I left that and I came here to serve the people and I do not care whether I lose or win the Elections, and if I lose, I will get out, my head held high.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- On the other hand, Madam Speaker, a Cabinet Minister on a gross salary of \$185,000 (thanks to the tax cuts in the Budget), will now take home almost \$140,000, an increase of \$6,400 per year. This is what a Cabinet Minister on \$185,000 will take home. In other words, the net pay of a worker on a new minimum wage for the whole year is less than the net pay rise of a Cabinet Minister after the last Budget. Is this how the Government serves the people?

These are legitimate questions, Madam Speaker. How does this Government expect people earning \$110 per week to support their families or save for the future?

Furthermore, even the implementation of the minimum wage rate, as I had alluded to the Honourable Minister on the other day, has been a failure. We know that many workers in the garment industry have been receiving less than \$2.32 an hour, and that has been the rate since July.

Madam Speaker, on Saturday, I was told by a lady that she has been working for 18 years in a garment factory and she is earning \$2.35 per hour. In our view, the Ministry has failed. When they implemented the minimum wage, they should have looked at all the Wages Council Orders. You call it the National Minimum Wage, and you do not, so garment factories continue to pay wages like \$2.35 an hour.

So, Madam Speaker, the Ministry has simply failed to enforce the minimum rate on many businesses and employers, and this failure will continue in the implementation of the new rate of \$2.68.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not nonsense! You go and talk to this woman.

Madam Speaker, when the Government goes out and parades itself as having a national minimum wage of \$2.32 now \$2.68, they need to go back and relook at all the Wages Council Orders

and make sure that when they call a national minimum wage, that at least, some of the formal sector (garment industry is a formal sector and they continue to pay below the minimum wage).

The Honourable Minister knows that I wrote a letter to him and to the company as well.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That's your arrogance! That's your arrogance!

This Saturday at 2.00 p.m. at Rishikul Sanatan College, I invited some of them to come and we will be making another major policy announcement as a truly multiracial theme, 'NFP Continues its Talanoa and Listening Campaign'.

Madam Speaker, let me say this in conclusion, despite what the Government side says, after three years as a minority but effective Parliamentary Opposition Party, Team NFP is now opening itself for judgment by all our people. Above all, we are offering ourselves as a truly credible alternative to the current Government.

Madam Speaker, let me say this, change is coming, change is inevitable, and may God Bless Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I begin my contribution by, firstly, taking this time to thank my voters, who believed in me and gave me their mandate to be their voice in this august House.

His Excellency's Address stated that we have come to the time where we now run into the last session of our parliamentary term. It gives me great honour to know that I have committed myself to serve to the best of my ability, despite all the ups and downs we have faced, especially as a Member of the opposite side of Government.

Finding myself in our important juncture in Fiji's political history in 2014, I thought to myself, what my role could be. And I could not help but adopt what Marcus Brutus said to Cassius at a similar time in another era, in which he found himself in a similar situation as myself, in which he pointed out then famously said:

“There is a tide in the affairs of men.  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to great fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat?  
And we must take the current when it serves ...  
Or lose our ventures.”

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and fellow Honourable Members of Parliament: I join my fellow colleagues to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech to this House on 4th September, 2017.

I also wish to associate myself to pray for the continued good health and long life of His Excellency the President and the first lady. Madam Speaker, I have the same prayers for you and all the Honourable Members of this House.

Madam Speaker, our colleagues have shared their views in the 2013 Constitution, and I wish to make my own contribution to it. Generally, the Constitution, being the supreme law of the land, must be the embodiment of basic human rights. Such a document must be realistic, whilst being able to withstand the test of time. It must embody a national spirit of patriotism, and encourage national entrepreneurship and growth. It must reflect a society that is equal in opportunities and sensitivity to cultural and traditional values. Importantly, it must be a document that embodies the people's will.

Whilst we engage in debate about the credence of the 2013 Constitution, we have to remind ourselves that the people of Fiji did not contribute to its formation. However, being a pragmatist, I know that when our political parties agreed to engage in contesting the 2014 Election under this document, we had acknowledged that our people expect us to minimise, as much as possible, any further unnecessary delays in the return of democratic governance for them.

I know that they will expect us to do what we can, to engage as leaders, to bring Fiji forward to a place where we can negotiate in their best interest as their representatives and make meaningful contribution in the constitutional evolution in Fiji.

On that premise, I will reiterate my earlier sentiments that Government can choose to be bigger than its critics. For example, they can review the current entrenched provisions in the Constitution requiring 75 percent Members of this House to agree, and thereafter further obtain through a national referendum 75 percent of registered voters' concurrence for any changes to be made. This is a ridiculous requirement, Madam Speaker, because it is almost humanly impossible. I call upon Government to consider making this document more flexible to change by removing the 75 percent provision requirements.

It is important to do so, not only to address the many unsavoury scenarios which threaten good governance, transparency and accountability, but to also review the inability of legal redress for subsidiary laws, such as the various Decrees, given recognition by the 2013 Constitution, like the:

- Justice and Administration Decree;
- Surfing Decree;
- Land Use Decree;
- Mahogany Decree;
- FNPF Decree relating to pensions;
- others which were implemented by the Bainimarama Administration prior to 2014.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency spoke about the Constitution as a document based on reality. Unfortunately, it seems that our current Government leaders are not walking the talk about reality. Reality, Madam Speaker, is the absence of the Mercy Commission, as enshrined under Section 119 of the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji also proudly displays the Bill of Rights that every citizen of Fiji can expect. I am aware that a lot of our serving prisoners have not been able to seek pardon from the Mercy Commission because they have been advised that it is not operational. So we have to ask whether there is a separate Bill of Rights for prisoners.

I am also aware, Madam Speaker, that the Parole Board which existed under section 49 of the Fiji Prisons and Corrections Act has likewise, not been effected. Madam Speaker, both these authorities come under the Honourable Attorney-General.

It would be interesting if one were to conduct a survey of how many prisoners are languishing in their cells, despite their parole terms having been met. Is this not illegal? There are the kinds of complaints along with other major cases of abuse, received from prisoners.

Madam Speaker, we speak of a nation that is enlightened, that is forgiving and that encourages rehabilitation after offenders have served their time for their misdemeanours. Let us walk the talk. The laws are meant not to gather dust, as His Excellency claimed. The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji was distinguishable according to Him in that sense, so what else can we do, Madam Speaker?

For a start, Madam Speaker, if the Government of the day were genuine about its intent to reflect on the mandate they often boast to have been given by the people, then I am wondering why they could not, at least, consider a few points of Professor Yash Ghai's recommendations which carried the voice of our people after a wide consultation.

I picked out three suggestions of what was suggested by Professor Ghai, as follows:

1. A caretaker government must be put in place six months before election. This kind of recommendation ensure transparency and guard against pork barrel politics.
2. That the country be divided into four districts or constituencies. Currently, with the one national constituency base, we have to question the logic of such a decision. For example, having just one constituency can mean a number of things such as:
  - i) Is it weakening the old power bases in multiple constituencies, or a new government trying to achieve their goals, making it easier to criss-cross from one end of the country to another or also;
  - ii) we suggest that it is aimed at weakening the ethnic divide in Fiji?

Madam Speaker, but whether this has been achieved, remains to be seen. In fact, my personal view is that, this could even trigger more racism at the end of the day.

3. There was a recommendation for a set of maximum term of an elected Prime Minister to be full term only for eight years. The logic behind this was to ensure accountability and transparency, remove opportunities for corruption and abuse of office and likewise, eliminate the possibility of a leader turning his high office into a personal territory or fiefdom.

Madam Speaker, it begs the question, why would Government disregard such logical recommendations? So, Madam Speaker, this is the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji for the people or is it designed to protect some people's interest, or only for two?

Madam Speaker, very briefly the inconsistency in the 2013 Constitution to certain legislations has even been cited by a latest ADB Report on the Public Financial Management Systems for Fiji. For example, the report cited that the Financial Management Act of 2004, as well as the Financial Instruction of 2010 has not facilitated clear accountability and governance of public funds to be consistent with the requirement of the 2013 Constitution.

Secondly, the ADB Report also cited the comprising independence on the tabling of the Auditor-General's Report in Parliament because the 2013 Constitution mandates the Honourable Minister for Economy to do the honours. Instead, the Report commended legislative changes be made to allow the Honourable Speaker to do the honour outside Parliament Session, to facilitate



efficient scrutiny of public finances. There is much more in the Report that would do well for Government to consider implementing.

Madam Speaker, even in an earlier report which has been conducted to do a stocktake of strengths and weaknesses of our Public Financial Management System, the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Programme (PEFA) which is co-founded by major donors, like the European Commission, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and four other champions of good governance Governments, had found that the delegation of staff appointment and remuneration to the Permanent Secretary as provided in the 2013 Constitution has an adverse effect on the Public Financial Management System in Fiji.

Those are major revelations, Madam Speaker, that any credible government would take note of and rectify, for to do otherwise would symbolise a government that is averse to the rule of law. In fact, those Reports should have been tabled in this august House for transparency purposes. It seems Government has now adopted a common practice of hiding things from the Opposition and from the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I will move on to speak about the Elections now which was another important issue highlighted in His Excellency's Speech. Let me just say that we note with interest the announcement that we would now have an increase of one seat in Parliament, taking the number of seats to 51 due to an increase in our population. Even though the Electoral Commission is mandated under Section 54 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji to make necessary changes when required, such major changes would augur well for credibility to be brought into Parliament for scrutiny and confirmation of data provided to back the changes. It is the transparent thing to do. It would be ludicrous to expect us to believe everything that the Electoral Commission says without verification.

This, Madam Speaker, are the inconsistencies in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji which lacks good governance principles. We must not, at any stage, allow our people to think that some in this august House or anywhere else, hold a higher authority than this august House. This should be an abomination, Madam Speaker, of the highest order.

While still on Elections, on the issue of early polling, it should be ideal to engage same day counting when Elections officials are already at the various polling centres. This, Madam Speaker, will be in line with the principles of conventional polling whereby counting is conducted as soon as the votes are closed. Any decisions otherwise will continue to raise red flags.

Madam Speaker, I note that His Excellency has revealed that Government will continue to engage in reforms and reviewing laws in this last Parliament term. On that note, I wish to comment on the LTA expected review.

We would be keen to know what this review will entail, especially given the various announcements in the recent Budget revelations. Will the review also cover issues that the country has been facing recently, like traffic congestions during peak hours which is unprecedented, Madam Speaker? This is currently a nightmare for all travellers, especially for those who travel from afar and would have to leave home at ungodly hours to make it to work at 8.00 a.m.

Imagine, Madam Speaker, when daylight saving starts, how will our children adjust themselves, given this is a major exam term? And for us as drivers, we will probably wilt from the heat. Of course, Madam Speaker, most of our colleagues on the opposite side of the House do not have to face this hassle daily, as most of them either live close by or they have the luxury of using their Government vehicle hazard lights to get quick right of way.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, still on the LTA review, we would be keen to know if the review will also touch on the employees' working conditions. If this is so, I suggest that the Honourable Minister takes the lead role.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency spoke about Fiji's economic growth. He claimed that in the Asia-Pacific Region, Fiji is one of the countries where inequality has decreased. I do not know about the reality of this statement, Madam Speaker. I know for sure that realistically on the ground, I can barely see indigenous Fijian businesses in the areas of commercial businesses. Likewise, I can barely see Rotumans or Rabi Islanders or those from Kioa in the area of business entrepreneurship. I note the increase of Asian, Arabian and Chinese businesses, and also note the increase of Pakistani nationals and Sri Lankan nationals in various sectors, like businesses and in our judiciary.

Madam Speaker, equality needs to be measured right down to the grassroots level. How many of our indigenous people live in the towns or cities with their own homes? How many of them will rent for the rest of their lives whilst they are working in the cities and end up going to live with relatives in the village when they retire?

It is not good enough to own land and not be able to do anything with it. Researchers have constantly revealed how, despite having so much resources in land, indigenous Fijians still remains one of the poorer lots in our society. Where is equality in this regard? We need to put in place structured plans to allow resource owners to partner in business ventures, that will enable them to engage in large scale businesses.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, during my response to the Budget Address, I had pointed out how the distribution of wealth and Government resources was being biased.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we are getting disrupted, please we need to hear the Honourable Member.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- In fact, I had highlighted how it seemed that the sugar industry was receiving significant favour, and yet the non-sugar sector was being left with meagre support.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Let him finish. Thank you.

Honourable Radrodro, you may continue.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I recently discovered, Madam Speaker, that the problem is even at administrative level.

The Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, Madam Speaker, that was an initiative of the current Government in 2010 and was supported through the European Union funding for five years which ended last year, is now struggling to survive. And this institution is currently looking after more than 30,000 non-sugar farmers, Madam Speaker.

I understand they were just been given \$50,000 in grant money. This is not only grossly inadequate to administer such as an institution and its much needed programme but importantly, it also points to poor planning and foresight by this Government. It indicates how Government is not serious and appreciative of donor support when it fails to assume responsibility for funding this much needed institution. I implore Government to look urgently into their plight, as again, it is an indication of inequality.

The staff, I understand, Madam Speaker, have not received any pays since June this year. They now have arrears in bills, not to mention their inability to service their members. Equality of wealth distribution also means lasting peace and sustainability in Fiji. Equality cannot be achieved when disparities are the order of the day.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also look at some of the enabling environment for economic growth and sustainability. Government has notably invested heaps into infrastructure development, particularly roads and bridges. But, unfortunately, we have to say that it has not resulted into the desired changes and progress that many thought would come about as a result of these expeditions.

The state of our public utilities remain very much the same, and in many instances have gotten worse, creating pain and suffering for the users. Many of our people in rural areas still need infrastructure, and are awaiting the benefits that the Government is often talking about to trickle down to them. They pay their taxes, just as the rest of us in urban centres do. In turn, they expect better services. In some cases, they have even been waiting since this Parliament came into being. The fact that this is the last session of this Parliament will probably depress many of them as they wonder whether or not, the much promised infrastructure development will see the light of day. They deserve good roads and they need broken bridges to be repaired, as the Constitution says, "every Fijian is entitled to equal opportunities".

As we get nearer to Elections, we are noticing how road works have increased in highly populated areas, but are noticeably absent in isolated outposts. Even two weeks ago when I was in Nadi and visited some squatter settlements like Ledusasa, I saw how they were brilliantly constructed. Good on them! They deserve to be looked after too.

But, Madam Speaker, equality and justice becomes apparently amiss, when just 200 metres away from them at Korovatu Settlement, we have the landowners of the Matavolivoli Subdivision still waiting patiently for their roads to be tarsealed. Their homes which is on a slope constantly gets flooded every time there is heavy downpour and according to them, this started when the Matavolivoli Housing project was constructed. There is a bridge leading to their homes which also gets flooded constantly and cuts them off from main access in heavy downpours.

Madam Speaker, in Natawa, Nadi, I had already mentioned that a bridge that was broken almost five years ago, remains in the state of disrepair. The villagers struggle when the rivers get flooded and the people carry their dead over the river by creating human bridges. Imagine the struggle children and workers have to endure daily.

Madam Speaker, some of the roads in my province of Naitasiri, like that in Nawaisomo, Nasoqo and Noemalu are still on the waiting list for construction. I ask Government to consider the plight of these villages urgently.

Madam Speaker, on water shortage, we are again in the period where drought often occurs and water cartages become an issue. The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has publicly stated that they are trying to get on top of things. That is not enough, we need them to be proactive and not reactive.

Whilst on the same visit to Nadi two weeks ago, consumers complained about how in some areas they did not receive water for two weeks and had to call WAF constantly before water was finally delivered to them. This is preposterous in this day and era. Why cannot WAF envisage such occurrences and begin placing water tanks and filling them constantly in strategic places, known to commonly experience water cuts.

Water is a basic amenity, Madam Speaker, and is needed for drinking, cooking and washing, not mention bathing. It is inhumane to deprive people of this basic necessity as the Constitution captures the right to provision of water.

Madam Speaker, there are communities having access to piped water but suffering from constant water cuts. Then there are communities for almost 47 years after our independence, who continue to live without piped water. A few of them have found mention and attention in this House from time to time, and there are many who are not known but have been corresponded to the line Minister.

Madam Speaker, I am most disappointed with how inadequate Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) has been performing its duties, especially in ensuring our waters are not only safe for travel but also safe for those who make a living out of it, and those who rely on it for daily sustenance.

The container ship that capsized and remains in the Suva Harbour is an eyesore and no doubt, a health and safety hazard. What is happening to those containers and what is the Government and MSAF doing to see its salvage? Can we suggest some COP23 funds or maybe some portion of the plastic tax to be allocated to remove those hazardous material? That is just a suggestion Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, allow me to make a few more general remarks before I sum up. We have been made to understand that some of our Fiji Police officers are fearing for the security of their jobs and their families' welfare. Apparently, it has been claimed that they are on the mercy of the Commissioner, who has the powers to hire and fire police officers. Quite a few find themselves appearing before the tribunal which unfortunately often takes forever to resolve cases, and this chews not only time but also resources. I think the Honourable Attorney-General will agree with me, at least, on this accord that justice delayed, is justice denied.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, powers are also vested with other authorities in relation to the employment of the civil servants, military and prison officers. This is simply disconcerting and contributing to a low morale in the Civil Service and Disciplined Forces.

Madam Speaker, I will now conclude my remarks by saying to our people that soon, you will be engaged in electing your representatives into this august House. His Excellency remarked that we need to contest the upcoming elections based on policies, principles and truth, and I could not agree more.

Often people have voted, ignoring the very principles of democratic ideals, like freedom of expression, freedom to voice an opinion, to dissent, to congregate at your free will. People are understandably voting for what they can get out of Government materialistically. Some are voting for security, some for hand-outs, times are hard I know, but I appeal to the people that we all just take a pause and re-examine our intentions. Are we willing to give up, to get something we may not necessarily need, but want? Who do you want to represent us? What are the characters of this person you would like as our leaders?

As much as it is a moral issue, it is also a practical one. It is said that, for some generations much is asked and for some generations, much is given. Much was asked for our past generations to make Fiji what it is today, and much is also asked today, to make Fiji free tomorrow. It is time we awake, arise and reclaim our nation, rebuild our country and reunite our people.

I shall end with a quote from our famous British American Author, Simon Sinek, who once said; "Leadership is not about the next election, it is about the next generation."

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I rise to join this House in thanking His Excellency the President for his gracious Speech in opening this new Session of Parliament and notably, the last one under this Government as we move on to the General Election in 2018.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, may I also pay my earnest tribute to previous governments and their leadership for all their contribution, their sacrifices, endurance towards nation building that has propelled Fiji to what she is today. And it would do our country a lot of good if this FijiFirst Government just remember that they are not the first to undertake development in the country. Even under their watch, Madam Speaker, the reconstruction of the bridge near the market is taking forever to complete.

Madam Speaker, on the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, His Excellency the President had said that it directs Government to take action to turn those ideals into policies, laws and most importantly, practices. And, Madam Speaker, for that to happen, the Government must have the futuristic direction of Fiji captured in our National Development Plan.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, this Government has failed to table this document as promised and how they are leading the Government without plan, is not surprising as you look at the chaotic manner the Civil Service Reform has been undertaken.

Madam Speaker, on the Constitution, His Excellency the President had hailed the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, as internationally acclaimed, but here in Fiji, this Constitution has remained a controversial document. Fijian people overseas have protested against it...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ...but in the local scene because of the laws in place, people are scared to publicly protest. But, Madam Speaker, some civil society groups, non-government organisations and individuals have tried to create platforms to talk about their concerns and disagreement on the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and we know, this led to the arrest and detention of political and civil society leaders, demonstrating Government's action to stifle people's freedom of expression and association.

Madam Speaker, may I remind those watching the television and listening to the radio, and more particularly the youths, on the undemocratic making of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

(Hon. Government Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- The 1997 Constitution was abrogated in April 2009, because the Fiji Court of Appeal had declared the *coup* of 5th December, 2006, illegal. The coup-makers, the Military Regime, did that in order to remain in power.

(Hon. Government Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- The Military Regime then appointed the Ghai Commission which consulted widely to make recommendations for a new constitution for Fiji. That Report did not suit the Military Regime's intentional purpose, and it was destroyed and replaced by the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Obviously, Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji has been heavily influenced by the Military Regime and subsequently imposed against the will of the Fijian people. Therefore, in my view, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji was never, never really meant to promote genuine democracy but rather to facilitate the 2014 General Election, to ensure that the Military Regime remained in power.

Furthermore, Section 131(2) of the Constitution states, and I quote:

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

This strongly suggests that that the military can intervene in the running of the Government.

Madam Speaker, may I quote from Mr. Edward Gibbons who says:

“The army is the only order of men sufficiently united to concur in the same sentiments and powerful enough to impose them on the rest of their fellow citizens but the temper of soldiers habituated at once to violence, renders them very unfit guardian of any Constitution.”

Madam Speaker, that is why this Constitution of the Republic of Fiji must be reviewed.

Madam Speaker, our Fiji Constitution must be written in the hearts of Fijians and not just in a document. The Constitution must speak to the people in their own language that will go to their heart for them to own the Constitution, and for this to happen, the people must genuinely participate in the Constitution making process and likewise the Constitution be representative and reflective of the people. For example, the two Rotuma Bills, the Rotuma Affairs Act Cap. 122 Section 15 - the duty of the Minister responsible for Rotuman Affairs is to act on the endorsement of the Rotuma Council. The Rotuma Council has called for the Bills.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I thought we have a procedure that when the Bills are before the Committee, I mean when the Committee is dealing with the Bills then we do not actually comment on that. The Honourable Member is actually commenting on specific provisions of the Bill and the Bill is actually before the Committee.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. You are quite right, the Bills are still with the Committee, please do not refer to the Rotuma Bills.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Madam Speaker, but I recognise that other speakers had mentioned the Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not question the ruling from the Chair.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

Therefore all the efforts by the FijiFirst Government in promoting the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji to attain it a degree of legitimacy and acceptance by the people through the naming of a road (just outside here) and the declaration of a public holiday is just a wasteful exercise, wasting the taxpayers money, wasting the much needed resources that could be used towards:

1. Rehabilitation of *TC Winston* victims who are right now still struggling to rebuild their houses; and
2. Establishing a proper waste management system particularly in the informal communities in the Khalsa Road, Tacirua, Tovata and Laqere areas and this will constructively contribute to SDG 6 which is on Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 13 on Climate Action.

Madam Speaker, there are several other shortfalls in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji which has been highlighted time and again and they will continue to be highlighted until this regressive document is amended.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, Fiji is probably the only other country in the world along with Myanmar whose constitution is almost impossible to review due to the requirements under the Constitution. For Fiji, under Section 160 calling for 75 percent of registered voters and 75 percent of Parliament to approve any amendment.

So, Madam Speaker, in summary this FijiFirst Government has locked all Fijians in accepting this Constitution of the Republic of Fiji against our will and automatically this makes the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. Therefore, when SODELPA comes into power in the 2018 General Elections, we will listen to the people, we will provide them with the review mechanism to enable their genuine participation and the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji will be reviewed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, on the Electoral Reform. With that backdrop on the Constitution, I wish to move onto the next contentious issue which is regarding the elections.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Salote Radrodoro you may continue.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

His Excellency the President made a very bold call when he said "... Fijians will be tested (next year)" and I believe my colleague the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu rightly responded to the same when he said and I quote:

“Elections will not be contested on the basis of race, religion but on policies and the policies of the FijiFirst alone.”

I fully endorse that statement because this Government has been there for the last eleven years and have not improved the lives of our people and have even gone worse due to the misplaced priorities of government and subsequent financial mismanagement as reflected in the recent Audit Reports.

Madam Speaker, the findings of these Audit Reports are alarming and this FijiFirst Government must take them very seriously. For example, as already mentioned, with the Ministry of Health, a container load of medicine that sat in the wharf for more than eight months and yet we hear of medicine shortages, even I believe in Ministerial Statements presented in this House. We also hear of unused grant in the Ministry of Health while we are still faced with poor health services delivery.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What Point of Order?

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Let me speak.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Shut your mouth. I am speaking, shut your mouth.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! We have a Point of Order.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- I am going to speak about my Point of Order. You do not tell me what. Shut your mouth.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What Point of Order?

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, the Point of Order is the constant reference to the Auditor-General's Report by the Honourable Salote Radrodro. I just wanted to seek your opinion, is it right for them to make conclusions about the audited report without it being scrutinised by the Standing Committee on the Public Accounts Committee?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- That is the Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- The issue raised does not qualify under the Point of Order process and I will therefore not be making a ruling on that.

Honourable Salote Radrodro, please continue.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.



Madam Speaker, these Audit Reports are a true reflection of the FijiFirst Government's performance in the implementation of its policies and programmes and the subsequent financial mismanagement. So, the Auditor-General is saying there is unused funds in the Ministry of Health, the drugs are sitting at the wharf and yet there is a shortage of medicine. What does this tell us about this Government?

Madam Speaker, the taxpayers of Fiji must ask, is this the kind of Government we want? Does Fiji deserve this kind of Government? This side of the House have continuously called for electoral reform and recently SODELPA and other registered political parties presented the same to the Electoral Commission, but unfortunately the Electoral Commission did not abide by its own 2014 Annual Report Recommendations for Electoral Reform and is also selective in the implementation of the Multi-Observer Group's recommendations.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that we have a lopsided Constitution, draconian laws, unfair electoral system and offices and institutions whose independence and competence are highly questionable and who are involved in the electoral process, not serving its key purpose but rather too eagerly massaging the political cause of this FijiFirst Government to retain them in office.

Madam Speaker, may I move onto COP23 and Climate Change. A lot has been said in this House and in the media about COP23 and the pivotal role the Honourable Prime Minister plays in assuming the Presidency in Bonn, Germany in November this year.

Madam Speaker, may I also acknowledge the efforts by UNDP and all the donors under the Parliamentary Support Programme and under your leadership and your office, Madam Speaker, in providing us with workshops that include some aspects of COP23 and particularly climate change. However, Madam Speaker, in a recent newspaper article whereby the Honourable Prime Minister in responding to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's comments on COP23, he said and I quote: "Please, COP23 and climate change have nothing to do with politics".

Madam Speaker, it is obvious from that type of comment as a reply to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's statement on what Fiji's position should be on some of the issues to be discussed at COP23 highlights the lack of a basic understanding of the politics of climate change and that has been so far the subject of 22 UN Conferences of Parties and the 23rd, which the Honourable Prime Minister will preside over.

Madam Speaker, for the Honourable Prime Minister to continue to deny that COP23 and climate change have nothing to do with politics only helps to confirm the growing perception on the lack of basic knowledge and understanding of international and multi-lateral diplomacy which begs the question; why the Honourable Prime Minister and the Government and as Minister for Foreign Affairs encourage our overseas missions to lobby for him to take on the chairmanship role of COP23?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You know nothing.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I must be saying something true, that is why you are interjecting.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You know nothing.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- When here at home he rejects any dialogue on the subject with the Opposition and taxpayers who pay for the salaries and allowances including those of the entourage.

Madam Speaker, it seems that this has become the standard response to those in Fiji who want him to explain in depth the relevancy of his COP23 Presidency and for the FijiFirst Government's own compliance challenges in the generation of power, mining operations, gravel extractions and indiscriminate logging here in Fiji. This was amply demonstrated when he tried to shrug off pertinent issues from the floor during the recently concluded Methodist Church, *Bose ko Viti* Annual Conference.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister must understand that he is not the only Prime Minister or Minister for Foreign Affairs to Chair the UN Conference of the Parties on Climate Change since there have been already 22 other Presidents of COP who held the position before him. If the UN Conference of the Parties was solely to do with our children....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Are you jealous?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- We are talking about national issues not personal issues.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Well, you are personalising it.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- That is not personal, that is national.

If the UN Conference of the Parties was solely to do with our children and great grandchildren that we have to look after, as the Honourable Prime Minister claims, then why has it taken 22 UN Conferences and 22 COP Presidents to address the issue of global warming and the whole international communities still a long way from concluding an international treaty or convention on climate change?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Paris Agreement.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, it is simply because of the widening and growing political differences among Member States and Regions who make up the UN Conference of Political Parties as exemplified by the recent notification from the United States of America to withdraw from Paris Agreement.

But having said that, Madam Speaker, we recognise the huge responsibility that comes with the position of being the COP23 President, and we wish Fiji well and we trust that we will rise to the challenge and also at the same time we urge Government to be more inclusive and engage in a bi-partisan approach by including Members of the Opposition in the Fiji delegation.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what the Honourable Prime Minister said.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- This just goes to show that they have never been part of Government. In previous governments, both sides of the House go to international conferences like that. So that just goes to show the kind of people we have on that side of the House; do not know how to run the Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I wish to continue with the relationship between the Constitution and the women of Fiji; the development and protection of women. Madam Speaker, women's group generally view the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji with great disappointment for

it threatens women's life in a variety of ways and is much less favourable to the position of women as compared to the Yash Ghai Draft.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You want to know where I am getting this, you listen, it is coming.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, women in Fiji compose more than 50 percent of Fiji's population and yet their issues, interests what is to protect them, empowerment and development is not reflected in the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, last month the Fiji Women's Forum and the Fiji Young Women's Forum held their National Convention in Nadi and which I attended, with the objective of scrutinising the 2013 Constitution and its limitation in advancing the development and empowerment of women particularly in the political space.

Madam Speaker, may I just verify how many minutes I have left because of all that interjections?

HON. SPEAKER.- Two minutes.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- In that Forum, Madam Speaker, they also highlighted that they had made submissions to the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji making process but the Government, the Military Regime at that time had been deaf and blind to the cries of the women.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Furthermore, Madam Speaker, one of the strategies identified to increasing women's political participation is the Temporary Special Measure or TSM as widely known. Madam Speaker, the SODELPA Government when we come into power after the 2018 General Elections will implement the TSM to promote and increase women's participation in Parliament. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite the Honourable Dr. Reddy to have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, my fellow colleagues and Members of the Opposition bench. I wish to join our Honourable Prime Minister by thanking our President, His Excellency, Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konousi Konrote, for his most gracious Speech given to us all while opening the new session of Parliament last week. Madam Speaker, his Address echoed the sentiments of our Honourable Prime Minister of one Fiji, one people having a common destiny.

Madam Speaker, while going over the speech of His Excellency the President, we note a common sentiment that of meeting the aspirations of ordinary Fijians, raising the benchmark of excellence in whatever we do, accountability and speeding up reforms to remain relevant to contemporary global market should we want to benefit from what is out there on offer.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President reminded us all about keeping in mind our Constitution of the Republic of Fiji as it is because of this Constitution that we all are here today.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- That is right.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- He further notes that the Constitution gives us a way to live together, to govern and to make decisions.

Madam Speaker, having read that, I once again read the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. It is important, Madam Speaker, to remind us all again and let me quote:

“WE, THE PEOPLE OF FIJI,

RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the *iTaukei*, their ownership of *iTaukei* lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language;

RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the Rotuman from the island of Rotuma, their ownership of Rotuman lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language;

RECOGNISING the descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and the Pacific Islands, their culture, customs, traditions and language; and

RECOGNISING the descendants of the settlers and immigrants to Fiji, their culture, customs, traditions and language,

DECLARE that we are all Fijians united by common and equal citizenry;

RECOGNISE the Constitution as the supreme law of our country that provides the framework for the conduct of Government and all Fijians;

COMMIT ourselves to the recognition and protection of human rights, and respect for human dignity;

DECLARE our commitment to justice, national sovereignty and security, social and economic wellbeing, and safeguarding our environment,

HEREBY ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI.”

Madam Speaker, I urge all Honourable Members from the Opposition bench to take time out and, at least, read the Preamble every now and then. We should not only remind them of their way into this House but also our duty to this nation as required by the supreme law.

Madam Speaker, this Constitution has one of the most extensive Bill of Rights:

1. Right to life;
2. Right to personal liberty;
3. Freedom from slavery, servitude, forced labour and human trafficking;
4. Freedom from cruel and degrading treatment;
5. Freedom from unreasonable search and seizure;
6. Rights of arrested and detained persons;
7. Rights of accused persons;
8. Access to courts or tribunals;
9. Executive and administrative justice;
10. Freedom of speech, expression and publication;
11. Freedom of assembly;

12. Freedom of association;
13. Employment relations;
14. Freedom of movement and residence;
15. Freedom of religion, conscience and belief;
16. Political rights;
17. Right to privacy;
18. Access to information;
19. Right to equality and freedom from discrimination;
20. Freedom from compulsory or arbitrary acquisition of property;
21. Rights of ownership and protection of *iTaukei*, Rotuman and Banaban lands;
22. Protection of ownership and interests in land;
23. Rights of landowners to fair share of royalties for extraction of minerals;
24. Right to education;
25. Right to economic participation;
26. Right to work and a just minimum wage;
27. Right to reasonable access to transportation;
28. Right to housing and sanitation;
29. Right to adequate food and water;
30. Right to social security schemes;
31. Right to health;
32. Freedom from arbitrary evictions;
33. Environmental rights;
34. Rights of children;
35. Rights of persons with disabilities;
36. Limitation of rights under states of emergency;
37. Enforcement;
38. Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission.”

Madam Speaker, it is the most widely circulated Constitution in the history of this country to the ordinary people, the rank and file.

Madam Speaker, a pocket version of the Constitution was created so that it is easily carried by people, they can read it and access it. This is the only Constitution, that is, the pocket version, which was translated into the vernacular languages so that people who are not able to read English et cetera, can read in Hindi or *iTaukei* language and even Braille. This is Constitution was promulgated in 2013, within a year we had an election.

Madam Speaker, we did not hide the Constitution from the people. We took the Constitution to the people and we campaigned on this Constitution, it was a referendum. We told them about this Constitution when we were campaigning, we got the Constitution and said that we are going onto election on this; this is our Manifesto and that is their Manifesto, you choose whom you want. This Constitution by us or want theirs. They voted for us to come into this Government on this Constitution.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, it is important they understand this. We did not hide this. We went to the people on this Constitution. They could have said no.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has pleaded to all of us to step up and make every effort to ensure that every Fijian in this country see gradual improvement in their standard of living. Improvement of the standard of living of the rank and file, the ordinary Fijians requires a number of elements as its foundation. These are:

- A responsive public sector governance model with the will and determination focused on the welfare of every Fijian;
- Ability to provide an educated and skilled workforce;
- A well-defined and modernised formal and informal institutions;
- A well-functioning judicial system which will enforce contracts and be the ultimate bastion of justice.

Madam Speaker, the Public Sector Economic Governance Model is premised on Adam Smith's 1976 treatise "*The Wealth of Nations*" which recognized the role of the State in defence, justice, education, public works and institutional design as binding constraints to facilitate private economic activities, with the necessary tax institutions for financing these public goods. Our Government is not shying away from this basic fundamental economic foundation philosophy.

Madam Speaker, within this framework, while we reach out to the underprivileged in the society by alleviating some of their immediate problems, we must invest in critical institutions and infrastructure that will contribute to a sustained long term growth and development of the country. It is through this that we can grow our economy and create more surplus for welfare as well as raising income of the nation, firms, households and individuals. Our model of tourism and trade based development contributes to growth and development of our economy in a number of ways. The foreign income inflow fills in the savings gap in the local economy. Foreign investment led foreign currency inflow creates employment, raises national, household and individual income as well as rise in government income. Foreign investment also provides us to raise our bar of service excellence, incentive to reform public sector and other key institutions

Madam Speaker, today our foreign reserve stands historically high \$2.4 billion; never ever this country had a foreign reserve position of \$2.4 billion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Hear, hear!

(Applause)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, this speaks volumes about our financial leadership, our leadership by the Honourable Minister for Economy and our leadership of the Reserve Bank and the Governor because if we do not get our financial side correct, it will be difficult to survive in an open economy.

Madam Speaker, this growth process has led to our people witnessing the greatest level of economic democratization never experienced before. Inevitably, over the last two decades, the size of both our public and private sectors has expanded substantially thus providing greater opportunity for participation by Fijians. Madam Speaker, our growth model is not centralised to the urban area thus depriving and leaving our rural interior population stranded. This is where our tourism sector comes in handy because it reaches out to the people in the interior and the coastal areas.

Madam Speaker, despite not acknowledged by Members of the Opposition, this broad-based political and economic growth strategy has also delivered a salient causality, and they are the gradual removal of rent seekers. Madam Speaker, prior to 2006, our country was fraught with rent seekers. These are individuals, big businesses, oligarchs in our society who cast their influence over political allocation which had been a primary source of private benefit to them. Not only this rent seeking behaviour raised costs to the public sector, it denied other smaller businesses to participate in public sector activities thus restricting the growth and diversify in broadening the economic base.

Madam Speaker, over the last two decades, the removal of rent seekers has witnessed significant broadening of the economic base and increased participation by small and medium enterprises. This has also resulted in increased competition which has forced individuals and organizations to invest in new skills, upgrading of skills and qualifications and seeking of new opportunities which in turn has provided positive signals for attraction of foreign investors to bring in their savings, technology and expertise.

Madam Speaker, while doing this, there have been calls from some in the Opposition bench that we still lack full democracy. When one looks at the size of our country, the level of growth and development, one will note that we are way ahead in terms of our standing with respect to democracy. I urge these Members of the Opposition to look at some of our Pacific Island countries or Asian countries and then comment on where we are lagging with respect to democracy.

Madam Speaker, your good-self would have read or heard often, very conveniently we compare our growth status with Singapore. But Singapore's growth model was not that pleasant as some may think. Singapore's former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew argued in his 2000 memoir on how his "soft" authoritarian rule allowed Singapore to sustain high rates of growth and I quote from his memoir.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. SPEAKER.- Please continue.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- And I quote:

"I believe what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy. The exuberance of democracy leads to indiscipline and disorderly conduct which are inimical to development."

Madam Speaker, if you really examine the phenomenal success of the East Asian economies - Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and China, none of them had democracies in a substantive sense during their miracle years. So I urge the Members on the Opposition bench to place things into perspective and acknowledge the great work that our Government has done to have democracy at all levels despite several challenges and demands.

Madam Speaker, a lot of research has been done on this subject area and if any Member is interested in additional reading, I urge them to read at least this 2002 article titled "*Democracy and Development; Cruel Dilemma or Symbiotic Relationship*" by Jagdish Bhagwati, a very famous international trade academic. Published in the *Review of Development Economics*, Vol. 6, Issue No. 2.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- (Inaudible)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- But read it, Honourable Biman, you will get some ideas. Thank you!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, having said the above, to support national growth and growth of different sectors of the economy, we need to have a responsive and quality education sector.

Madam Speaker, we cannot be stagnant with our thoughts, ideas, strategies and growth models. We need to consistently evaluate ourselves and bring about relevant transformations to attain national vision and aspirations. Our Government, amidst all its development plans, has time and again stressed that education is our top priority. We want to achieve success for all Fijians and attain peace and prosperity through a nation-wide educational drive. We want to ensure that every Fijian citizen's educational aspirations are met and all barriers to education are removed, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, our Government's intention is to build an educated Fijian society, where people excel in various areas and professions. We want to build a culture of academic excellence. Added to this, we want to safeguard our treasured cultural diversity and equip our children through values and virtuous education.

Therefore, it is mandatory that our education system reflects these transformations whilst delivering its service to the children. We cannot be rooted to past methodologies and practices and use that to educate our children in the present era. The world has changed and we need to rise up and adopt change if we wish to be relevant. Change is vital for the progress of any individual, group or organisation and education is seen as the single most important ingredient and vehicle of the change process.

Nowadays, we are not only preparing students to find successful career pathways but also nurturing important skills, such as resilience, technologically innovating, flexibility, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, and having creative mind sets. We are not only preparing them for the labour market as alluded to earlier by my colleagues, the Honourable Koya and Honourable Delana, but also preparing them to be job givers. The mind-set of looking for jobs but the mind-set of going and developing their own skills and expanding in the private and business sectors, which is the engine of growth, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, schools, therefore, have to offer situations and an environment which inculcates these attributes and thereby supporting students' holistic growth and development.

Madam Speaker, the entire landscape of education in this country has changed over the last two decades.

Madam Speaker, we never used to hear about this notion of 'free education' before. Never in Parliamentary debates, never outside, Madam Speaker, but now, suddenly, everyone is talking about it. Why? Because FijiFirst has brought this to the forefront.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, everyone is now talking about free ECE, primary, secondary and tertiary education. We never used to hear about this before. Why?



Madam Speaker, no one bothered about the plight of the poor households who could not pay their children's bus fare and now they are talking about shoes and bags. They never bothered about, Madam Speaker, how this poor household with four or five children, all going to urban school, travelling every day and how they will find cash in their home, in the rural areas. They never bothered about who and how they will pay their bus fares in the rural areas, Madam Speaker, while they are cash poor. Every morning to find \$5 to \$6 to pay their children's bus fare is a lot of money. No one bothered, Madam Speaker. Suddenly now, they are talking about providing them with shoes and bags.

Madam Speaker, everyone is now talking about technical education. We never used to hear about this before. So, why are they talking about it now? Because you know why, Madam Speaker, it is a revolution. When there is a revolution, everyone will talk about it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, now, they have seen the things and they can also do it but it is not only about ideas. It requires much more than that; the will power, determination and the right driver of the team. In a team, we need just one or two good strikers. That is what Team Fiji is about.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- But Madam Speaker, on that side, everyone wants to become a striker.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You hear Honourable Bulitavu, he wants to be a striker. You hear Honourable Karavaki, he wants to be a striker too. Where is the team, Madam Speaker? Here is the team, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, we are unlocking potentials and opening doors by educating our children.

Madam Speaker, as alluded to early on in the speech, we need to support the key sectors of the economy by ensuring we have highly skilled and qualified workforce to push the frontier and maintain a competitive edge. Our Government's investment on the tertiary education sector should be noted.

Madam Speaker, at the expense of repetition, I wish to state again that education provides the tools for people to realise their capabilities, create and access opportunities for productive lives and contribute to national prosperity.

Madam Speaker, I wish to make a plea to some Members on the other side that education of our children should not be subjected to politicking. While we are espousing the ideology of 'one people, one Fiji and one destiny', we cannot allow some people with personal agenda to destroy this education platform by exposing our children to politics of race, religion and ethnicity to social media blog site, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, we cannot afford to go back in time. We want to give the right education to our children, we owe it to them.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, let us spread the message of His Excellency the President and our Honourable Prime Minister about 'one Fiji, one people and a common destiny.' Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to make my response to His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2017, in formally opening the 2017 Session of Parliament.

The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and guests who are present in the gallery today, not forgetting the interested viewers watching television and live stream from their homes. Madam Speaker, global warming and climate change issues and challenges were also highlighted in His Excellency the President's message to Parliament, which again is a timely reminder to Fiji as a nation and we need to rise up to this alert from the highest office of the land.

Madam Speaker, climate change, as we all know, affects everyone regardless of what part of the world and time we live in, particularly for small island nations like ours and its specific neighbours. Scientists have found support for the controversial idea that global warming is causing more frequent and destructive natural disasters, a subject that has been fervently debated during the past decades. The oceans have taken in nearly all of the excess energy created by global warming, absorbing 93 percent of the increase in the plants and in the inventory from 1971 to 2010.

From a Christian perspective, this climate change was foretold in the *Holy Bible*. The earth is growing because mankind is not a good steward and when mother earth gives way, we know what is at fault. Simply put; we are reaping what we sow. Our behaviour through times, so now it is time to change things around and it is our collective effort throughout all the cross sections of society, including us in this august House.

Natural disasters have different names in different regions of the world. In North Atlantic, it is called Hurricane; in Asia, it is called typhoon; and in the Pacific region, it is known as cyclone respectively. Madam Speaker, be it hurricane, typhoon or cyclone, intensification has been linked to rising ocean temperatures since 1970. Tropical oceans sea surface temperatures worldwide have been warmed by about an average of 0.5 Degree Celsius, however, warming in the North Atlantic Basin has been rapid at about 0.7 Degrees Celsius since 1980s.

Madam Speaker, we in Fiji experienced TC *Winston* at Category 5 in 2016 and very recently, the United States of America has just experienced Category 4 *Hurricane Harvey* hitting Houston and Texas and also the Caribbean's small island groups suffered the brunt of Category 5 *Hurricane Irma*, which made devastating impacts on these islands, before hitting Florida at a more reduced strength.

These and other forms of natural disasters are here to stay. They are our realities and from scientific evidence and information, our experiences and our faith are telling us that if we do not change our stewardship behaviour, we should expect the worst - like it or not. We need to take extra action for the sake of our future generation.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Speech did mention about the leadership role of Fiji in the Conference of Parties 23 Presidency. This is one of the great achievement made by Fiji in this decade and for that we congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister and his COP23 team, to name the Special Envoy, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Rural Maritime Development, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu who serves as a high level climate change champion and the Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan, who serves as climate negotiator, for the hard work and effort put into the preparation phase and as they continue to perfect their final touch prior to the 16th-17th November COP23 meeting in Bonn this year, 2017. All we could do is wish them well and more so our prayers.

Madam Speaker, Fiji will be the first Pacific nation invited to fulfil such a role as this. What an achievement! Yes, God does work in mysterious ways as a region of the world that is destined to bear the worse brunt of the effects of climate change, we have been given a crucial platform to put forward our case. Fiji will also be a voice for our dear Pacific neighbours and other vulnerable places and communities across the globe.

The 23rd Session for COP23 to the United Nation Convention on Climate Change will be organised by Fijians, hosted at Headquarters of the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat in Bonn, Germany. Germany is one of the frontrunners of climate change and also with each financial contribution to this worthy cause.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 the German Government committed about €2.7 billion as official budget funds for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Germany has increased its commitment more than 5 folds since 2005. However, 2014, the country became for the first time the largest bilateral donor on climate finance.

Madam Speaker, may I repeat; climate change is a reality. Daily occurrences of flooding, droughts, water shortages, traumas, earthquakes, *tsunami*, hurricanes and other natural disasters are unfolding in our very eyes throughout the world with no exception for Fiji. As we have collectively experienced over time the space, they have negative impacts on people's lives and jeopardise development and nations' general well-being.

Developing countries like ours need support for making our economy climate friendly and at the same time be bold enough to keeping reminding the big powers of the world to rethink their actions. Having say this, I am reminded of the story of Goliath and David in the *Holy Bible*, we need to embrace and be thankful for any platform for each voice. Anyway, God always use small things for His purpose. There you go - Fiji, go, preach it to the world!

(Chorus of interjections)

We small nations like Fiji matters too, for God loves small countries and its people as much as He loves big countries and big people.

Madam Speaker, we read critics in the media and from other information sources about Fiji being part of COP23. My word of encouragement to the President of the COP23, the Honourable Prime Minister and his team; all the famous people who have gone before you, let me name a few, from Mother Teresa to Nelson Mandela, from the Wright Brothers to Steve Jacob, every person who has achieved great things has had critics. You will have yours too and remember, if you are a front runner you will always be the focus of those trailing behind you. The more success you have, the more opportunities there will be for distraction. My advice is, pursue what God has put into your heart. It is the matter of the heart and small is always beautiful.

Madam Speaker, to encourage entrepreneurship at all levels in Fiji through the Small Micro Business Grant has been an eye opener to many small businesses in Fiji. Despite economic barriers to obtain start-up capital, small business owners remain resolute and enthusiastic in their pursuit to doing more with less and living out their dreams. This grant programmes signifies an opportunity to help entrepreneurs rise above financial challenges. All these small businesses grow, job are created, ordinary Fijians are given more opportunity to learn skills and develop invaluable expertise in business.

Madam Speaker, women entrepreneurs play a critical role in economic development by boosting growth and creating jobs, particularly for the poorest 40 per cent of the population. A vibrant entrepreneurial sector is essential to small business development, entrepreneurs are people who sends opportunities, innovate, take risk and develop new goods and services. They drive business dynamics, that is, the birth expansion, the contraction and the death of business and also fuel overall economic growth.

Madam Speaker, I would like to expand on the sentence used by His Excellency the President when he said and I quote: "One force is the spirit that most lightly drove you to public service, the desire to serve your country and the people of Fiji".

As Members of this august House, we are seen by our people as leaders of the nation, meaning, ultimately, the prime motivation for leadership should be a desire to serve the people. First and foremost, a good leader serves people. There is a saying that says: "You meet people going up and you meet people going down." It means you respect and serve people when moving up the ladder and you respect and serve the people when moving down the ladder.

Madam Speaker, we should be servant leaders, self-interest should not motivate servant leaders, it should rather ascend to a high plain of motivation that focuses on the needs of the people. Remember, as long as power dominates our thinking about leadership, we cannot move towards a higher standard of leadership. So I encourage everyone, we must play service at the core for even though power will always be associated with leadership, it has only one legitimate view, that is service.

Madam Speaker, attributes of 7 leaders include vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, stewardship, credibility, communication, listening, empathy, empowerment, confidence, commitment, persuasion, patience and the list goes on.

Madam Speaker, people largely depend on the leader's character. Leadership is all about character and one character attribute that is most important in establishing credibility is honesty. Both honesty and integrity are integral part of good leadership. Ultimately, the choice we make is between service and self-interest. The leader who does true service sets about providing the resources others need to achieve success. They say that by making available to the people information, time, attention, materials and other resources and the higher corporate purposes that gives meaning to the world.

Madam Speaker, to all the Members of this august House, as we make our final lap of this race, comparing it with the 1,500 metre race final round, the time keeper is ringing the bell. For some, the finishing line is now getting blurry, and for some, the finishing line is clear, but the energy is draining out. And for some, no matter what, they will successfully finish the race because they understand their purpose in Parliament. At the end of the race, you can confidently say: "I have completed the race, I have fought the good battle."

Madam Speaker, to conclude, my words of encouragement to all Members of this august House, I quote from the *Holy Bible* in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 1 Verse 7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

The fear of the Lord means "submission to the Lord and His revelation." When one is afraid of something, he either runs from it, or submit to it. The latter idea is inferior. It is a healthy fear, like the fear of electricity or the fear of strong current which causes one to act in an appropriate manner.

The beginning does not mean that the fear of the Lord is left behind in the course of acquiring wisdom, but that is the control principle of wisdom.

Madam Speaker, I fully support His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji's gracious Speech and I thank you for your indulgence. May God bless Fiji and its people and the world at large. Shalom.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion and at the outset wish to thank His Excellency for his gracious Speech, stating how his Government has conducted itself since the General Elections of September 2014 and what the next General Elections mean to all our people.

His Excellency spoke about the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the 2018 Elections, where many of us will once again present yourselves for scrutiny before the electorate, his Government's legislative agenda and Fiji's international role, particularly in climate change.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, His Excellency rightly asserted the need to respect each other and urged us to commit to a higher standard of unity and democracy. His Excellency stated that it appears that it is easier for some of us to converse with each other in this august House rather than on the campaign trail.

I wholeheartedly agree. To that end, I call on the Government side to make good on the guidance of our President and offer us the opportunity to campaign together.

If we are upfront in contesting our ideas in a rationale manner to the electorate, it would hold democracy in good stead for Fiji, it would also show exemplary form to our young people, many of whom will participate in Elections for the first time in 2018 and have been through a turbulent political climate over the last two decades.

Respect, unity and democracy are noble and critical ideas for any nation in the pursuit of genuine, social, economic and political advancement. It can be achieved through real consensus, dialogue and negotiations in a climate devoid of fear of reprisal or retribution for expressing one's thoughts and utterances and conducting oneself with honesty and integrity and most importantly, in the national interest.

Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with His Excellency's emphasis on the need for us to walk and talk on the moral high ground, I respectfully differ with him on the statement that the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is internationally acclaimed. A constitution is the foundation for good governance, transparency, ethical conduct and above all, genuine Parliamentary democracy but I believe there is absence of it now, Madam Speaker.

His Excellency reiterated his message during Constitution Day and went on further to suggest that the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji was a product of widespread consultations, even through letters and e-mails.

Madam Speaker, the events leading to the formulation of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is well-documented as follows:

1. How the internationally acclaimed 1997 Constitution was abrogated;
2. How the Constitution Commission chaired by Professor Yash Ghai was appointed;
3. How widespread the Commission's consultations were and how the Commission's Report was trashed;
4. How the Constituent Assembly was derailed by decreeing the need for existing political parties to re-register, thereby neutralising them from participating in the process to formulate a draft constitution; and
5. Above all, how the Military Government single-handedly railroaded and drafted the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji in a climate where public gatherings required permits and only one voice was allowed to prevail - that only of the military government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security and myself are the only two serving Members of this Parliament who have participated in a process of formulating a constitution through Parliamentary democracy and inclusivity after widespread public consultations resulting in the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1997 that was, is and will be the only internationally-acclaimed Constitution of Fiji, and this is an indisputable fact, Madam Speaker ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- ... and the Attorney-General should understand that. I am not going to be distracted by him too. On and off sometimes, Madam Speaker. As defensive drivers, we need to have a good look at the rear view mirror, where we are going and who is coming behind us.

As repeatedly highlighted by our Party Leader, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is subservient to decrees and promulgations that have been renamed as Acts without being brought to ratification to the floor of this Parliament. If this is not a case of riding roughshod over parliamentary democracy then, what it is? We do not hire Qorvis for a million-dollars or more to write our speeches.

What bothers me, Madam Speaker, is the selective memory of some Honourable Government Members, particularly on the front two benches. They are quick to interject and label Honourable Opposition Members as hypocrites when we talk about constitutional process in formulation of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and the 1997 Constitution.

They have selective memory, picking and choosing history like a buffet when history is written in indelible ink. That is already written, it cannot be erased. They are quick to criticise the *coups* of 1987 and 2000, but choose to deliberately forget the 2006 *coup*. They only focus on the 1990 Constitution, Madam Speaker ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P. CHAND.- ... and may I remind this House that in 2000, the Honourable Prime Minister was the leader of the Fiji Military Forces, he could not control his guns. He is to be blamed for the 2000 *coup*, not the people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, a *coup* is a *coup*, it is a power grab at gunpoint and we have had the overbearing stench of *coups* in our nation four times in the last 30 years.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- In fact, I believe the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution on 10th April, 2009, and the trashing of the Fiji Court of Appeal Judgment that ruled that the actions of the Military was illegal, is similar to the second *coup* on 25th September, 1987...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- ...when the *Deuba Accord* which outlined the way forward after the first *coup* was overthrown.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- I am not going to be intimidated by those losers there.

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, similar to 1990 Constitution, is borne out of a military *coup*. As a party, the NFP has and will never support the toppling of a democratically elected government and usurping of parliamentary democracy, including any illegal act to topple the current Government. God forbid this does not happen.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, we protested and opposed every *coup* from 1987 to 2006. We have not being a party to any *coup*. The Honourable Attorney-General knows this very well. He was a member of Democracy 88 which was a group that together with political parties and Fiji Youth and Students League of which our party leader was an integral member, were quite active in organising peaceful protests.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Honourable Member has made a comment about me which is incorrect. He said that I was a member of some youth league in 1988. I was not a member of any youth league.

Let me clarify, Madam Speaker, if I could, I was arrested in 1988 on the anniversary of the first *coup* on 14th May, 1987 at Sukuna Park with 18 other people, with some catholic priests and others. I was not a member of any youth league, I was there as my individual self.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Change it, change it.

HON. P. CHAND.- I am very clear, Madam Speaker, he was a member of the Democracy  
88.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Under the Point of Order, it has been mentioned that you are misleading Parliament with what you have said.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Based on my comment earlier on, if there is any misleading information, that it has to be corrected and it has been corrected by the Honourable Attorney-General. Please, refrain from referring to that issue again and continue with your speech.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I withdraw that. He was part of the protestors.

(Laughter)

HON. MEMBER.- Observer!

HON. P. CHAND.- Protestor, he did not like the *coup*, but he supports it now after 2006.

(Laughter)

HON. P. CHAND.- Shame! It is a real shame!

It is ironical that the Honourable Attorney-General, like some other prominent leaders who were even victims of the *coup*, Madam Speaker, participated in....

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! I have already said, do not refer to that issue again, it has been settled. Can you carry on with your speech but do not refer to that issue again.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I am not referring ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P. CHAND.- Anyway, I withdraw that, and what I said was that....

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! I did not ask you to withdraw. It has been clarified and you will now continue with your speech without referring back to the issue that you had just mentioned.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.



Simply, we understand that there are many people who were appointed to the Military Regime Cabinet in 2007 but anyway, Madam Speaker, there are a lot of people who championed democracy should oppose *coups* but they do not do it. It is very important.

Madam Speaker, you will recall that in my Budget response, I spent a great deal of time highlighting how our public healthcare system has become a blight on our nation. Just to repeat the words of the leader. I am compelled to address it a little more today in line with His Excellency's reminders on the Constitution which in Section 38, affirms our right to health. Section 38(2) says, and I quote: "A person must not be denied emergency medical treatment."

Even though predictably Section 38(3) limits those rights by stating, and I quote:

"In applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available."

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- They are not doing it.

HON. P. CHAND.- They are not doing it because some of the funds that went missing of about \$90 million, they do not have the record of it.

I am disappointed, therefore, that there has been very little public update on the progress of recruitment of health specialists from India, despite the large delegation going there earlier this year for that express purpose.

Madam Speaker, the Medical and Dental Practitioners Act were fast-tracked under Standing Order 51 in April this year. We had requested for more time for public consultation but this was denied. What was then the urgency for?

His Excellency's guidance to us in his Speech was that, we were to seriously consider and carefully study legislation. If legislation continues to be fast-tracked under Standing Order 51 in this august House, Madam Speaker, then how can we evaluate and robustly discuss any proposed new legislation?

There is a running tally that Honourable Gavoka had previously expressed on the number of Bills passed under Standing Order 51. Madam Speaker, this tally does nothing to promote our standing as legislators, and let me say that Government avoids debate and behaves autocratically.

I also note the statement by the Honourable Prime Minister that there will be an announcement on final salary increases for doctors, this week. This does little to allay the concerns of the public when medical consumables and pharmaceuticals are still in short supply.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Where?

HON. P. CHAND.- Everywhere, in all the hospitals. Labasa Hospital, you go to all the hospitals...

(Hon. Government Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- On the matter of salary increases for doctors, I would be grateful if we could hear about salaries for our Psychiatric Medical Specialists and whether their proposed salaries

are on par with the doctors. It is a real fact that medicines are running out in all the hospitals. I believe the Labasa Hospital face this problem with a lot of people affected by this.

(Hon. Government Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- Why would you want me to produce evidence, you people do not produce evidence.

(Hon. Government Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- I am an honourable person, I do not come and lie. I am not going to go and campaign offering things.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Additionally, Madam Speaker, Parliament needs to be provided with an update on the Makoi Maternity Unit and the long-awaited opening of this facility. Updates should also be given for the development of the Mental Health, Cancer Radiotherapy Institution and Maternity Unit at the CWM Hospital as it has now been four years since the project assessment phase.

Madam Speaker, I also note the lack of necessary monitoring and evaluation of national health programmes, given that the timeliness of these evaluations is critical to prioritising of resources. Some of these reviews include; the dental health survey, the national profiling study on sanitation and water source analysis, and the national reproductive health survey.

If Section 38 of the Constitution is important to the State, Madam Speaker, the issues I have highlighted need urgent attention, not rejection. The intention of this Section of the Constitution cannot and should not be ignored and like any functioning democracy, it falls on us as representatives of the people of Fiji to ensure that our right to quality healthcare is upheld.

I turn briefly now to the grave climate uncertainty gripping the world, Madam Speaker. I extend our heartfelt sympathies, prayers and solidarity to the people of Texas, the Caribbean, Florida and all those affected. Our nation is no stranger to the unforeseen emergence of the fury of Mother Nature, as we continue to pick up the pieces from *TC Winston*.

Perhaps, Madam Speaker, it affords us the opportunity to escalate international discussions on Loss and Damage as the incoming COP23 Chair. We are all cognizant of the climate risk and insecurity, and this key negotiation matter will not patiently await the 2018 agenda when the need is now.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- We understand what we are talking about. Your laughing and acting will not distract us. We know you are an actor.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, let us be sincere about promoting an indigenous people's platform on climate change and genuinely ensure that voices of our indigenous people, including our Rotuman people, are at the forefront of traditional knowledge and traditional science solutions to the climate change dilemma that requires many diverse opinions to collaborate on.

Climate Change is not solely about climate, green or blue bonds or carbon trading. In this regard, the legislative agenda highlighted by His Excellency last week, again, lists traditional knowledge and cultural expression as legislation that we should expect in this Parliamentary Session. I would urge this Government not to list legislation that they have no real intention to bring to this House.

In comparing His Excellency's Speech this year to that of 2016, Madam Speaker, there are a number of proposed legislative changes that are repeated. There was legislation proposed in His Excellency's Speech of 2016 on 'transplantation of human organs', which has completely disappeared from the list of legislative agenda. I am sure our kidney dialysis patients would have really valued the possibility of kidney transplant capabilities in Fiji and I renew my call for free dialysis for the kidney patients in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, finally, the agricultural sector under this Government for the last 10 years has taken a battering, more severe than the damage done by Mother Nature. The Honourable Minister for Agriculture very recently stated that the annual average Food Import Bill for the last five years was \$778 million for importing food that can be produced locally, but nothing has been done to reduce this. It is imperative that a detailed and holistic review is carried out on agricultural produce, like milk, copra, *yaqona*, cassava, rice, ginger, *dalo*, sugar, local vegetables and fruits.

Madam Speaker, on few more things; firstly, for Labasa, there is so much congestion in the town. As I speak here, I will put to the Government that we need a back road in Labasa to facilitate and remove the congestion on our roads.

Secondly, I call upon the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment to put into practice and bring about the elections for Town and City Councils very urgently.

The Fiji Road Authority, Madam Speaker, indeed our budgetary provision for national roads, jetties, ports and airports has dramatically increased despite that money, the progress is very, very slow. This is just what I overheard from someone that when the contractors get a contract for \$14 for digging a metre of drain, they charge \$14, but they go and subcontract it for \$8 or \$6 and \$7. Then that subcontractor, subcontracts to another contractor for \$5 for \$3.50.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- Because I cannot tell them directly what I want them to do, but what I am saying is, go and investigate the FRA and the contractors. You have the power to do it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Just like you investigate other people, investigate them as well.

Madam Speaker, in the 'no-one left behind scheme' of the Government, this is a sustainable development programme and this comes from the GOPAC, the UNDP and just like the MDGs that were there before, now are the SDGs. Every Government that is a member country, they do it. They are just blowing the whistle, "the Bainimarama Government has done this, Bainimarama led-Government, my Government, it is not my Government!"

Nebuchadnezzar when he said, "This is Babylon the great that I made with my hand." You know what God did, he made him into an animal. The Book of Job says, "God without inquiry, shatters the mighty and reduces them to nothing and replaces them with others." The Prophet Isaiah

said, "He pulls down powerful rulers and reduces them to nothing." You may have the military might, you may have the acting skills in Parliament, you may have the skills of saying many things, but when God comes into power just like the man there said....

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- That is the first bell, two more minutes.

(Laughter)

HON. P. CHAND.- About Goliath, David was able to defeat the giant and I am telling you, we the National Federation Party will be defeating the FijiFirst giant.

(Laughter)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, another very important thing in this nation is that the Media Decree needs to be repealed, the media in Fiji needs to be free and they should be able to report everything that is happening on the ground, not only what the Government does but what affects the people, what is lacking in the society, et cetera. There has to be a balance, you do not control. The *Fiji Times* does nothing for us but the *Fiji Sun* you have hundred photos of yours.

(Laughter)

HON. P. CHAND.- Every Sunday and no one likes you. They do not have any appreciation.

Madam Speaker, for free flow of information, there is a famine of information in this nation because of the Media Decree. Having spoken on the need for change for the better, I do not see it happening under the current Government, but let me say this and declare that change is coming and change is inevitable in 2018. God bless Fiji.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Laisenia Tuitubou.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, fellow Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of this august House: I am honoured to address this House on the current and future youth development activities in the Ministry, undertaken around Fiji. I would like to show my support to the most gracious Speech by His Excellency the President, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote.

We need to focus on equality, a common identity, civil, and socio-economic rights. We need to focus on modernising the economy, increasing economic opportunities and encouraging economic development throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, the actual number of youths varies and I hope that the census will provide us with more certainty. It will be a snapshot of the status in Fiji at a particular point in time. Current figures indicate that up to 70 percent of our population is under 40. This is significant and indicates the challenges we face as a country in ensuring full employment to ensure our economy continues to grow, not just for eight years but every year.

Madam Speaker, we need to take up the challenge of bringing in more women into the formal economy, more persons with disabilities in the informal and formal economy, increasing our capacity to innovate and create.

Madam Speaker, recognising the fact that majority of youths live in our urban areas, my Ministry is providing more support to our urban youth as part of the number of new areas of focus. We recognise that traditional training we provide for rural youths, rural areas will need to be adjusted to meet the needs of urban youths. We intend to provide training for youth to develop job application skills, trade and technical skills. We will continue to provide leadership and management skills within different context of urban and rural settings.

Madam Speaker, however, we need to understand more clearly the skills required for the economy. I have just returned from the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Uganda and almost all those attending have a similar experience, the mismatch of skills being provided through our educational institutions and the needs of our economy. We need to get ahead and to think of our economy in twenty years' time and start building for it now. We need a vision to do that and we need strong will and determination to change the way we do things to change our tradition and culture to fit our modern society.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is ready to take on these challenges and we are changing the way we support our young people.

I will establish a national youth advisory body in the next few weeks to advise our Ministry on the needs of the youth and how best we can meet them. Our Non-Formal Education Council will soon need to address coordination in the areas, as there are several Ministries in this business and a larger number of NGOs, many of whom provide almost the same training. This will be fully representative of communities, we will focus on the youth and particularly, youths at risk.

Madam Speaker, as I had reported to this House previously, we are expanding our co-operation with the Fiji Corrections Service. We have provided our values based training for young men and women inmates in Suva and we are going to extend this to the North and West.

We will work soon to identify young people who have been in our correctional facilities, who can be trained to offer our Seed of Success training in communities and Corrections facilities. We believe that this will not only provide a small source of income to those young people identified, but will also ensure that peers talk to peers about how to put their lives back on track when they re-integrate into their communities.

Madam Speaker, we hope soon to introduce the Duke of Edinburgh International Award to our youth in Corrections facilities, as well as to those who are in the red zones, who may face a strong probability of going to prison. We need to work together to prevent that from happening by empowering our youth with values of respect and tolerance, of hard work and determination to develop skills, to develop abilities, to problem solving, debate and discussions while respecting different opinions.

The Duke of International Award has been operating in Fiji since 1965 and has had its highs and lows. We are determined to ensure that this Programme serves the needs of the youth from the ages of 14 to 24, as it helps young people in developing life skills which require sustainable efforts and self-directive learning.

Madam Speaker, it promotes mainly inquiring mind skill development, from learning sign language to baking, getting physically active which is essential, given our NCD challenges. It gives

service to those who are less fortunate and experiences adventures, so the young people from the urban areas go and stay in the village context for the first time and vice-versa.

I have spoken before of our efforts to involve more women in our training. This is an ongoing focus as we seek to recruit more women to undertake carpentry courses in our training centres in Sigatoka, Macuata and Kadavu. But expect this to take a bit longer, the recruitment of some men into the traditional women's activities of cooking, bakery and perhaps, massage. This does require us to change our gender stereotype and it does require us all in this House, Madam Speaker, to contribute to this. Unless and until we live in equality, we will not achieve that in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I was delighted to inform this House last year that we had encouraged young women in the Eastern Division to participate in the basic carpentry training. I am even more delighted to say that this trend continues in the Western, Northern and Central Division.

We work with the Technical College of Fiji and the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to help communities rebuild their house after *TC Winston* and because they run short of carpenters, we have trained the youths to do the rebuilding. We are now working to distribute some basic carpentry tools, as these communities were very happy to get the skills but they need tools to rebuild.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, we have broken the new barrier of women participation in our programme. In July 2017, in Yanuca, for the first time ever, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji trained two young women as boat masters. The training was organised by the Ministry. After the first day, the young women told her friends about the training and on the second day, several more were hoping to join but unfortunately, this was not possible.

On Friday last week, the same training was completed in Malake Island where I gave six licences to six women, eight Indo-Fijian fishermen along the coast, and I must thank the people of Malake for hosting 109 students or youth. One of the young woman said that when receiving her certificate she said, "what men can do, women can do better", but this needs to become the mantra of young women and guide us all as we continue to break down barriers and create equality.

My Ministry, Madam Speaker, has also embarked on working more closely with the Ministry of Agriculture. My colleague, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture has indicated that he wants to get more young people into agriculture and like me, he wants to ensure that this becomes a commercial operation.

Modern techniques including soil analysis to ensure young people grow what is appropriate is the key. Due to the price of *yaqona*, this is being produced but as we know, what goes up must come down. It is, therefore, important for young farmers in diversify and ensure that there is a constant supply of whatever product they are committed to. Within the Ministry of Agriculture, we are working to ensure that funding gets to the young people and together with my Ministry's support, the Ministry of Agriculture is providing technical expertise to provide the mentorship which is needed to ensure success.

Madam Speaker, a similar partnership is developed with the Ministry of Forests as we work to ensure recovery of forests lost, as we expand our agricultural commitment to be compensated by planting new trees. This will also ensure we address our carbon footprints.

With the support from the Ministry Fisheries, we are similarly creating economic opportunities with young people, establishing shrimps and crab farms, as well as developing our

seaweed industry. The opportunities are endless and we need to prioritise and coordinate our efforts. We are absolutely committed to do this.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is focussing on youth at risk. We work more closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in a number of areas. This includes NCDs whereby doing increased physical activities is the key, with improving nutrition to address this challenge.

We are also looking at addressing the unfortunate high number of people committing suicide each year. We need to raise awareness of this and ensure that young people refer to experts to help them and their families address the issue.

Further, we are about to launch formally our Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Manual which has been developed in partnership with the Ministry and the United Nations Population Fund. Madam Speaker, we will roll this out with the Peer Counsellor from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, and our staff will be working with our young people who are willing to take up training roles.

Madam Speaker, with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts we are working into identifying young people who have dropped out of schools and universities. We aim to help them get into formal education to provide skills training and to support them into entrepreneurship activities with the support from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism. However, to be able to assist those who have dropped out of tertiary education, we need to access the information from the universities and this is something we are working on.

Madam Speaker, we have ensured that all our staff become more gender sensitive in our operation and this has been done with support from the Fiji Women Crisis Centre. In addition we have trained up to 150 young people in Nadroga/Navosa with the Fiji Women Crisis Centre of about 60 from the Eastern Division and generally a further 50 in Gau. We are looking forward to train a number of urban areas and settlements in line with our focus in urban areas. We believe that this will help us break the cycle of violence against women and children, and we thank UNICEF and UNFPA for their support for this initiative.

With the Honourable Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, taking on the Presidency of COP23 and in response to requests from our youth, my Ministry is working on a climate change initiative. I was a panellist in the 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting (9CYMM) in August, stating the stance of Fiji Government on climate change. The outcome of the discussion enables us to have a bilateral meeting with the Canadian Youth Minister. His Government is willing to assist the Government of Fiji after learning our strategy on some Small Island Developing States (SIDS). So with the Climate Change Unit, the Fiji Higher Education Commission and UNICEF have recently trained some of our staff in young people with regional qualification on climate change, disaster to risk, reduction and resilience. This is a pilot project and one we hope to roll out as we source funding. Our young people see climate change but they want to know what to do about it, and this is our way of addressing this issue.

Madam Speaker, I now want to address the other part of our work which is as important as youths; sports is in Fiji's DNA. However, I think that the DNA in many of us makes us spectators rather than participants.

My Ministry is finalising this National Sport and Physical Activity Policy and organising our role in promoting physical activity. This also recognises the importance of physical activity in fighting against NCDs. We need to turn our spectators into our active participant. This has to be

regardless of age as our youngest victim also suffer from Arthritis, Dementia and other challenges we all may need to face.

Our children will benefit from skills development through physical education and we are working with the Ministry of Education to develop that quality PE curriculum. In addition, we hope that this will include learning to swim, which is very necessary a life skill particularly given our affinity to the ocean.

We are working with the funding which my Ministry sought out from the UN office on sports for development and peace to develop PE Curriculum for our learners with disability. This project is being led in implementation by the Sports Commission and various stakeholders in an inclusive way. The financial year, Madam Speaker, we will work with the Ministry of Industry Trade and Tourism of Fiji to develop a policy and strategy related to sports tourism. This is a potential area of growth for us as we work to entice new visitors to Fiji as part of our overall tourism strategy.

We need to develop a sophisticated approach to which events we do it on the basis of our bid. We are delighted that we will be hosting the Oceania Rugby Sevens Championships for the next three years, the World Junior Weightlifting Championship in 2019 and under 20 World Cup of netball in 2021. These are good events for us to host. The Oceania event will be contributed to our bid to host a leg of HSBC Sevens Series in both weightlifting and netball events will bring the youths of the world to our shore and hopefully their friends and families. There are other events which seems to be attractive but we will be successful in terms of media coverage. There will be a different reason for bidding .to host different events.

I am delighted, Madam Speaker, that the Vodafone Arena will be upgraded. This will be a significant undertaking by the Fiji Sports Council and we will put the venue out of operation for at least nine months next year. However, it will be of great assets once it is refurbished and add to our ability to host major regional and world sport events.

The Vodafone Arena has served us well since it was first commissioned in 2003 through support from the Chinese Government. Once it is returned to its former glory, the Fiji Sports Council must ensure that it will maintain going forward.

We look forward to the refurbishment of the hockey and the swimming facility in Laucala Bay, also through the support of Chinese Government and we thank our friends for their ongoing generosity.

This year, Madam Speaker, we have seen the welcoming increase in the funding for all sports. As a result, we hope that the Fiji National Sports Commission will promote the development of sports as the grassroots level in a consistent way. Like the Ministry, the Sports Commission is also focussing more on working in urban areas, working with our national sports organisation. We hope to see an increase in this stability of physical activity programmess and basic sports competition in our communities. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services measures the health of our people in joint outreach programme with this Sports Commission. However the Sports Commission, Ministry of Health and my Ministry must go to the next step to advise on both nutrition and physical activity regimes, to ensure we address NCDs in a comprehensive manner.

Madam Speaker, following the review of the National Sports and Physical Activity Policy, we need to focus our energy more on the development of people through sports. These means a number of things including more funding for development as we heavily focus on elite competition. We are able to get more people active, we expand the pool of talent from which we can select our national teams.



Madam Speaker, the Ministry is working to develop our monitoring and evaluation system and determine that we move from our previous output approach. To merely 'kick the box' to a way in which we can measure the impact of our programmes on youths or sports and physical activity. This will ensure we achieve value for money or the money we use.

Madam Speaker, there is much work to do, with an increasing number of partnership being established by the Ministry, we will continue to serve the needs of our people, especially the youths and promote good mental and physical health through physical activity.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, my Ministry will continue to carry out this role and functions for the youth in the four Divisions and continues to strive to meet the unique challenge of our youth in the 21 century in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I commend His Excellency's Speech and thank him for his wisdom and guidance.

Just before concluding, Madam Speaker, I just want to reiterate a verse that was used in Parliament by a Member. Jesus Christ was crucified and suffered to redeem us from our sin. So, the past, present and the future sins have already been washed and if you believe in that, because it is dangerous to quote core message from the Bible and relate it to the political will. So, once said by His Excellency the President "to walk with Jesus work is less important than to work while He walks." Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and that brings us to the end of our sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions to the debate. It has been robust and healthy and Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 2.07 p.m.