

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 8TH MARCH, 2018

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, it is International Women's Day and I wish to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the House and, of course, all the women of Fiji the very best for the International Women's Day.

Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018 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

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament.

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

International Women's Day

Honourable Members, today, we celebrate International Women's Day which has been observed for over 100 years and is now celebrated around the world.

The theme for this year's celebration is and I quote: "*Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives*". It draws attention to the rights of rural women, who make up over a quarter of the world's population, and are being left behind in every measure of development.

We must press for progress by motivating and uniting friends, colleagues and communities to think, act and be gender inclusive. Let us work together to transform the momentum into action, to empower women in all settings, rural and urban, and to celebrate those who are working tirelessly for progress.

A display has been set up at the main foyer of Parliament by the Civic Education and Media Team, in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has provided some badges to commemorate the day. I urge all Honourable Members to have a glance during the parliamentary tea and lunch breaks.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have been informed that there are no papers and documents for presentation today. We will move on to the next Item in the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration 2015 Annual Report

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration 2015 Annual Report.

The Standing Committee is established under Section 109(2)(e) of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration for the year 2015, specifically in terms of the department's operations and administration.

The Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration has embarked on reforming the national security sector and managing global arrangements, defending national security interests and maintaining Fiji's contribution to global peace.

Madam Speaker, the task of strengthening the national security apparatus is critical at a time when threats to the nation will continue to grow. The rise in radicalisation of extremist groups and greater instability globally, to the threat of terrorism, transnational crimes and rise of pandemics, asylum seekers and climate change has made the world uncertain.

As part of its new strategic direction the Ministry will devote resources and policy support mechanisms to improve the defence and security sectors. This is part of improving Fiji's sustainable development, expanding economic growth, protecting the country's borders and enhancing the quality of life for Fiji citizens and visitors to our shores.

The Committee commends the good work of the Ministry and achievements reported in its 2015 Annual Report. While applauding the achievements of the service provided by the Ministry, the Committee had also identified some opportunities for improvement, which are outlined in the report.

I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister and his Permanent Secretary including all staff of the Ministry for their dedication to national service and for a job well done.

I also wish to thank the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their commitment and dedication towards the compilation of this Report. Last but not the least, I must thank the Committee Secretariat for all their effort in putting this Report together and for the tremendous work undertaken.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence –
Fiji Corrections Service 2015 Annual Report

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Fiji Corrections Service 2015 Annual Report.

The Standing Committee is established under Section 109(2)(e) of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Fiji Corrections Service (FCS) 2015 Annual Report specifically on the Department’s operations and administration.

Madam Speaker, the FCS has moved from relying on punishment-based approaches to a more modern approach of rehabilitation of convicts, through implementation of various programmes to help them obtain skills and knowledge to facilitate their re-integration into society upon release.

Madam Speaker, the FCS’s strategic direction is aligned to the Government’s Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development (RDSSSED) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Committee had an opportunity to visit the Corrections Facilities in Suva and Naboro to get first-hand information on the FCS Annual Report 2015. The positive impacts of rehabilitation programmes for inmates are evident in all activities of the organisation. The Committee notes that the FCS has made some initiatives to progressing the SDGs, namely:

1. SDG 1 (No poverty): The FCS has put in place rehabilitation programmes for inmates with the intention of instilling entrepreneurial skills to make them self-sufficient, in turn reducing their reliance on family members or Government social welfare benefits;
2. SDG 2 (End hunger): The Organization aims to achieve food security and improve nutrition through the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

The Small Business Units (SBU) of the FCS operating under a Trade and Manufacturing Account (TMA) is a prime focus in providing business skill sets to inmates who are selected in various fields of work. This will enable inmates upon release to be productive and law abiding citizens of the country.

Madam Speaker, it is worth noting that return to Government from the TMA in 2015 was \$103,384.56 and from January to July 2016, the return increased to \$358,160.23. The FCS has noted that it strives to deliver quality service to ensure outcomes including, key financial outputs and a return of investment to Government.

Madam Speaker, the Committee commends the good work of the FCS and achievements reported in its 2015 Annual Report. While applauding the achievements of the Service, the Committee had identified opportunities for improvements as well. These are outlined in the Report.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the Commissioner of Corrections and all officers for a job well done and their tireless commitment to public service.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote. The question is, that a debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member Oppose?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
Fiji Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2014/2015

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked by Parliament to review the Fiji Intelligence Unit (FIU) Annual Report 2014. Unfortunately, this Annual Report was not brought to the attention of the Committee until after we had completed and compiled our Report on the FIU Annual Report 2015, which was tabled in Parliament as Parliamentary Paper No. 73 of 2016.

Upon completion of deliberations, the Committee was in total agreement that each recommendation and finding as highlighted in Parliamentary Paper No. 73 of 2016 was also relevant to the FIU Annual Report of 2014. In light of the above, Madam Speaker, this Report by the Committee is a near duplication of our Report on the FIU 2015 Annual Report.

As with the 2015 Report, our Committee felt that FIU needed to further strengthen their abilities to combat ever growing criminal activities taking place globally, as that would enhance their efforts, should they become a standalone entity in the future. Other recommendations included, capacity building and the establishment of clear demarcations of inter-related agency roles.

The Committee commends the capacity building efforts carried out by the Fiji Police Force in support of FIU, and urges that this practice be continued.

I thank the Committee Members: Honourable Vijay Nath; Honourable Dr. Brij Lal; Honourable Viliame Gavoka; and Honourable Prem Singh, who were present in the production of this Report, and also the Parliamentary staff who assisted.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, Madam Speaker, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote. The question is, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member Oppose?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to, again, have the floor.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
Fiji Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2016

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, upon conclusion of our deliberations of the Fiji Intelligence Unit Annual (FIU) Report 2016, the Committee was pleased to note the tremendous progress made by the FIU in the fight against money laundering and other criminal-related activities in Fiji.

Six recommendations have been put forward which we believe will assist in the FIU's mission of implementing an effective intelligence management framework. The Committee noted with interest the high level of specialised expertise required by FIU employees, and recommends that FIU is adequately equipped to secure, up-skill and retain these highly skilled individuals at all times.

Also of note, Madam Speaker, were the numerous global scam cases that have reached our shores which continue to grow annually. The Committee encourages FIU to play a more active role in alerting and educating the general public through awareness campaigns.

I thank the Honourable Members involved in the production of this report and also the Parliamentary Staff who assisted.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote. The question is, that a debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion is agreed to.

QUESTIONSOral Questions**Removal and Destruction of Mangrove Areas
(Question No. 28/2018)**

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Minister explain why the Government permits the removal and destruction of large areas of mangrove, thus negatively impacting the country's ecological diversity and contributing directly to climate change issues?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. The question itself raises some issues. We really wish the House would do some research before they come and ask questions that have sweeping statements made in them, Madam Speaker. A very general question, Madam Speaker, it will be good if it was

HON. RO T. V. KEPA.- Answer the question.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am about to, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, questions like this really requires some specifics but because it is a general question, I will endeavour to answer.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member may be referring to foreshore development that is being undertaken around the country. The Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources is the lead agency in coordinating our Mangrove Management Committee which collates and discusses issues relating to the sustainable management of our mangrove forest. Let me now educate the Honourable Member that even though my Ministry is responsible for the issuance of foreshore leases, collectively there are three Ministries involved on the issue of mangrove. These being:

1. Ministry of Lands, for the leasing of foreshore areas;
2. Ministry of Forests, on the licensing of mangrove harvesting for commercial use; and
3. Ministry of Environment, which provides the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for developers.

Madam Speaker, the Committee as referred to earlier is working on a Mangrove Management Plan and this Government regards this as an extremely important issue. For this reason, consultations have been conducted with relevant stakeholders.

It is this Government, Madam Speaker, which has ensured that this Committee is driven to have the Mangrove Management Plan completed and endorsed by Cabinet, and will definitely see that it is in force. It is this Government, Madam Speaker, that has now improved the processes with respect to foreshore leases, to ensure the sustainable use of our nature.

Madam Speaker, the past governments actually neglected this particular important sector and even supported mass destruction of foreshore and its mangroves without any proper rehabilitation or remediation in place. There were large areas of foreshore, I think, there was one about 208- odd hectares or 540 acres of standing mangrove that were taken out.

Madam Speaker, today the issuance of leases over the foreshore of Fiji takes place in an environment, where there is a strengthened inter-Governmental coordination on the protection of mangrove resources. At this point in time, Madam Speaker, Government promotes the reforestation of mangroves at a ratio which is much higher than that harvested.

Madam Speaker, to say that Government permits the removal and destruction of large areas of mangroves is actually and totally inaccurate, irresponsible and to end, mischievous, to say the least, Madam Speaker. Government at this point in time takes much pride in achieving a balance through economic development and conservation, especially in the Rewa Delta.

Madam Speaker, to clarify this point to the other side of the House, this is the first Government that has gone ahead and included in the lease conditions rehabilitation measures that should be taken by any developer and even to the extent that it is an obligation for the lessee to replant the mangroves at the same site or at other sites. Previously, developers that took place neither specified nor enforced this to ensure that the future generations will still benefit from the mangroves and it is importance to our ecosystem.

In addition, Madam Speaker, past governments neglect, it is even sadder to note that they did not even keep records. So the process now is more thorough and my Ministry is continuously improving the system, to ensure that this natural resource is not exploited irresponsibly. The thorough process includes ensuring that the applicants for foreshore leases actually submit an EIA, a Fisheries Impact Assessment and conduct consultation with resource owners in order to obtain the consent to waive traditional fishing rights. It is very important, Madam Speaker, that this consent to waiver will only be endorsed after a thorough verification by the *iTaukei* Lands and Fisheries Commission and such consent is actually witness by the Provincial Office after thorough explanation to the TFRO.

Madam Speaker, this is really to ensure that our environment is protected. And the TFROs are well informed and compensated for the loss of their traditional fishing rights. I hope that is a plus, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite supplementary questions, if any?

Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu?

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply to the question but can the Honourable Minister further elucidate on the reply given, it seems that it is conflicting. As a lead Committee of the Ministry of Lands, on the one hand, you are allowing their destruction by way of issuance of permits and members of your Committee from other Ministries then come in for the replanting programme. First you destruct and then you replant again, are this not conflicting?

Especially the case in mind is Nawi Island in Savusavu that was officiated by the Honourable Prime Minister before he left for the Bonn meeting in which he became the President of the COP23. So the question is; are these not a blatant disregard of the destructions of mangrove swamps and then the decision given tend to conflict each other, Honourable Minister?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I think I did explain about the delicate balance with respect to development and the ecological diversity of making sure that we protect our mangroves. But because the Honourable Member has raised the issue of Nawi, I will give you the details, Sir.

With respect to the Nawi development, the lease issued to Nawi Island Resort was for a five year term effective from 1st July, 2012.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- An eyesore.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Please, Sir, hear me out.

The total area was 27.61 hectares or 68.223 acres. The development lease was renewed on 1st July, 2017. The foreshore lease is adjacent to freehold No. CT39356. The EIA was approved on 21st September, 2016. Now this is the most important part, Madam Speaker, and I wish they realise it and stop hanging onto *Facebook* material.

Madam Speaker, the condition of the EIA approval is that, a minimum of 10.2 hectares is retained as a 'no take' reserve within the lease boundary. The marina, Madam Speaker, will entail a loss of approximately 10 hectares of mangrove, whilst 10.2 hectares will be maintained within the lease boundary, to ensure protection of retained mangroves and minimisation of effects of the visual character of Nawi from Savusavu mainland.

The areas for planting and rehabilitation which are demarcated, Madam Speaker, on the map as per the approval, the area demarcated for mangrove replanting will be and shall be surveyed after the replanting programme.

Compensation, Madam Speaker, for the loss of traditional fishing rights also was addressed through a Memorandum Of Agreement (MOA) which was coordinated by the Cakaudrove Provincial Council and endorsed by the *Turaga ni Yavusa* Nasavusavu. The quantum, Madam Speaker, of \$200,000 paid out in two \$100,000 instalments on 9th March, 2011 and 1st August.

HON. RATU N. T. LALABALAVU.- (Inaudible)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Let me finish, Sir, I will explain, I will tell you. I know it hurts when we tell the truth.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Let me finish, Sir, I will explain, I will tell you. I know it hurts when we tell the truth.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Cakaudrove Provincial Council.

The current status, Madam Speaker, on EIA is that, the approval was 21st September, 2016. The Engineering Plan approval date was 14th December, 2016.

Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, it is not use making just sweeping statements about these things and trying to alarm the public to say that we are actually destroying all the mangroves around Fiji, it is not being done like that.

Madam Speaker, what must be also remembered is that if you think about it carefully, we have the Presidency of COP 23, the President is sitting here. Do you honestly believe that Fiji would be trying to destroy its own environment in light of that? I doubt it very much, Madam Speaker. We have achieved a balance and the balance is development and sustainable use of our resources. And as I said, it is planted even more so than when you were in Government, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Can the Honourable Minister tell this House whether his Ministry and the Ministry of Environment are coordinating to make a national assessment of the extent of mangrove destruction, in terms of carbon emissions because that would be very important for our NDC determination?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I think this is a question related to national development and climate change, probably a question better suited for the Ministry of Economy and not for me but in any event

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I love the way you jump the gun! Please, it is International Women's Day, let us all be like women, let us be patient.

(Laughter)

It is actually a good question, Sir, but it should be directed to the Ministry of Economy but remember this, all that we do is in line with our national development plan. With respect to the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, yes, we do things in a collaborative fashion. But I think if you want a technical details of it, the Ministry of Economy would be the best to answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, in terms of rehabilitation and reforestation which the Honourable Minister has spoken about, how are they monitoring and supervising this Programme?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the Ministry has a monitoring team that continuously monitors all the development projects. Apart from that, there are various strict lease conditions that they must adhere to, as I have said earlier in my previous answer.

Exactly to what I said in my initial answer, there is post-development and whilst the development does go on, there is monitoring that goes on. We have a monitoring team in the Ministry and it is not just about mangroves, the monitoring team takes care of a whole lot of stuff, even gravel

extraction. That is their purpose and they do, do so, Madam Speaker. I hope that actually answers the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, we know that the Honourable Prime Minister as the President of COP 23 notwithstanding that, the people of Nadroga and Nadi are saying that one day very soon, there will be no mangroves in Nadi and Nadroga. We had a case, Madam Speaker, where a developer had land on a hill and they were shocked to see him clearing out the mangroves without any permission. So, fine! Three Ministries are looking at it but they are lax, they are not doing the job properly.

My question, Madam Speaker, is this; there is a waiver of fishing rights when you clear mangroves. You ask landowners to waive their fishing rights to clear the mangroves. Is the compensation been reviewed lately? Is it sufficient to justify clearing something into eternity?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I love this in the morning when they start grandstanding and make general statements and sweeping statements and everything is relative to where they come from – the people of Nadi and Nadroga. As a matter of fact, I actually come from that area too, from the West, they do not complain to me. So, please, Honourable Member, do not make sweeping statements without any facts.

Nevertheless, if he bothered again to check with the Ministry of Fisheries, there is a proper Fisheries Impact Assessment that is done.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (inaudible)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Please, Honourable Nawaikula, I really wish you just listen and stop being selective!

There is a proper Fisheries Impact Assessment that takes place, Madam Speaker. That Impact Assessment is not done willy-nilly on its own, it is done in consultation with the stakeholders. If you do not believe me, please, ask the Honourable Minister for Fisheries.

Just like anything in Government, there is a consistent review process with everything, Madam Speaker. This is being said time and time again and it is not just by me, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Economy, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, we all say the same thing. Fiji is in such a stage of development that we require consistent review for everything that we do. So I really failed to see the question. If he was just bothered to listen all the time, he would realise that. We always look inwardly and review our processes. There is nothing on the table at the moment but is something that we do all the time, Madam Speaker. But at the moment the Fisheries Impact Assessment that is done by the Ministry of Fisheries is what we have.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister inform the House on any further actions being taken by Government to assist the victims of *TC Winston* who are still living in tents for over two years now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, you may have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation) .- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member, on actions taken by Government to assist victims of *TC Winston* and the status of the Help for Homes initiative.

Madam Speaker, in the aftermath of *TC Winston*, Government initiated the Help for Homes initiative. The initial assistance was provided to those who are in the red zone area, which were twelve priority areas along the *TC Winston* path.

Madam Speaker, a total of 23,985 victims were affected, who were provided with either \$1,500 for a damaged roof only; \$3,000 for a roof and partially damaged home; while \$7,000 for a completely destroyed home. Government utilises \$86.2 million, Madam Speaker, in Phase 1, to assist these victims and the building materials for Phase 1 have been fully delivered.

Madam Speaker, Government received complaints that some of the *TC Winston* victims have been missed out, so Phase 2 was rolled out to help those who had been missed out in Phase 1. Under Phase 2, a total of 3,810 victims were assisted with the value of \$16.6 million.

Madam Speaker, Phase 3 was later implemented in 2017, to cater for those who missed out in Phase 1 and Phase 2. A total of 9,282 victims were assisted in Phase 3 with a budget of \$24.3 million.

Madam Speaker, additionally, a total of 772 beneficiaries were assisted through reimbursement of their funds, with a total value of \$2.5 million. These beneficiaries either took out soft loans or advances from their employers to rebuild their homes while the Initiative was being implemented. To-date, Madam Speaker, Government has expended a sum of \$127.1 million to assist 37,077 Fijian families to rebuild or complete their homes.

Madam Speaker, the supply of building materials is nearing completion as per our record. However, we are mindful of certain short supply and no supply of building materials, mainly due to beneficiaries being unable to be contacted on time, geographical location of beneficiaries and logistical issues.

Madam Speaker, Government remains committed to ensuring that building materials under this programme are successfully delivered without compromising accountability to the legitimate beneficiaries. We should also note that some Fijians have been prosecuted for false statements given during the Help for Homes initiative, some have been acquitted and are being helped as we speak.

Madam Speaker, the preparation for monitoring and evaluation processes has commenced whereby each beneficiary folder has been created and respective invoices, delivery documents, together with application forms have been filed for the house to house verification process.

Madam Speaker, the first phase of verification of beneficiary against items delivered as per invoices and delivery documents is expected to commence from May 2018. This task, Madam Speaker, is being carried out by the Ministry of Economy. It has a special Unit that looks after the particular phases of supply I have been talking about. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We are now open to supplementary questions. Honourable Members, please, be reminded that each Honourable Member is allowed 1 minute to ask his/her supplementary question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to ask the Honourable Minister, material belonging to 10 people in Navakawau, whose names are Mr. Alfred Alpana, Mr. Govind Sami, Mr. Arkesh Sami, Mr. Rakesh Naicker, Ms. Padma Wati, et cetera, can be returned to them. Their materials were taken away when complaints were filed but the DPP has not made any charges in the last two years.

The Honourable Prime Minister has promised to them in March last year that this will be returned, this year again, he directed the Honourable Attorney-General to look into this. Could the Honourable Minister see that their materials are returned to them simply because the DPP has not laid any charges for the last two years?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we cannot entertain that question, you are mentioning names and those people whom you had mentioned are not here to validate.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, my simple question is, if their material can be returned because there were no charges laid in the last two years?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, if I could, just a point of clarification, it is unfair to get the Honourable Minister for Women, who was actually responsible for going out and registering people to whom the cards were issued to buy their hardware. The audit team based at the Ministry of Economy is the independent audit team that does the assessments. And then should there be any anomalies as we know that some people have already been charged and brought before the courts, there was an issue in Taveuni, we understand also that there were certain locals, who had been stealing other people's hardware material. We also understand, for example, in the Yasawas, one company that has been given the contract to build a school under the *TC Winston* Rehabilitation and is going to the villages and taking their hardware to use it for the school rebuilding. There are a number of anomalies so the one that you have raised, yes, it was raised in Taveuni.

We have also asked the Police because there was a Police case and it was being referred to the DPP's office. We have raised it with them, to chase it up with them but obviously as you know, Honourable Nawaikula, we cannot go and tell the DPP what to do. But we can raise it with them, and we are hoping that there will be some clarification made in that respect very soon.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, would you like to add to that? Is that all right?

Thank you very much. I will now give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for her response in highlighting the number of people or families that have been assisted. However, from a Poverty

Alleviation perspective can the Honourable Minister confirm how many of those houses or those families, homes have actually been completed? Otherwise, those people who are without a complete roof over their head will continue to live in hardship or poverty.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I had stated in my answer that a verification exercise will commence shortly to ensure that those beneficiaries who had received the money, had, in fact, received the supplies and are building their homes. Madam Speaker, when that data is available it will be brought to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question in addition to what my colleague, the Honourable Nawaikula has mentioned. Similar incidences have also occurred in Matawalu in Lautoka. They had been charged and were cleared, but they are still waiting for their material which was taken away during the charging period. Can the Honourable Minister confirm that materials that had been taken under their name will be returned to them as soon as possible?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, these names were also brought to our attention and we had called those beneficiaries who had been acquitted, we had told them that they will be getting the materials that have been taken but the things that we need to work through, Madam Speaker, is to see which ones of them have actually spent the money, maybe some of them just given up the forms without spending the money yet, so these are things we need to clear before we will return those materials to them.

Madam Speaker, we have made an undertaking that we will revisit those persons, we had told them ourselves and this is an undertaking that we will carry out.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, the Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D.BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, this is the problem when the Government is disorganised. The Ministry of Women give cards and the Ministry of Economy will do the delivery. And the Attorney-General is on record on 24th January in Navakawau saying that 60 tonnes of materials will be taken to Taveuni after three weeks, but still the people in Taveuni are waiting.

What can the Honourable Minister do? The Honourable Minister is only reporting on the phases done. What can the Honourable Minister do to advice on how that can be reconciled? This is the problem. The Government should set up a specific Unit to carry out both, the cards and delivery. What can the Honourable Minister do to reconcile those problems? It is poor implementation Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, because of the roles that the Ministry of Women and the Ministry of Economy is carrying out in relation to Help for Home Initiative, the question that has been asked I wish ask the Honourable Minister for Economy to answer. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Attorney-General?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, again the Honourable Bultavu is trying to make a mountain out of a molehill. The reality is that, there were inquiries, the reality is that there were anomalies, the reality is that there were people who had filled out forms when they should not have filled out forms, and we need to have accountability in that respect. And if there are various charges that have been laid or investigations had been made they need to follow the proper process. Yes, we did meet those people. The reality though is, Madam Speaker, we did tell them that once we find out exactly what is happening, we will get back to them.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, none of the people on the other side are actually acknowledging the fact that such an initiative has never taken place, never ever in the history of Fiji of any cyclones that had taken place. And, Madam Speaker, what they also do not mention during the 1970s and 1980s, et cetera, when they did do rebuild, it was only ethnically-based rebuild. They only did it for *iTaukei* people.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a fact, it is a fact!

The Honourable Prime Minister was the one who changed it. That is the fact, it is not a lie. Go and check the National Disaster Management Office. That was what happened. And, Madam Speaker, it was only done in villages. That is a fact, and it was done only in selected villages. Today, Madam Speaker, any villager, any district, any province, as long as you are earn below \$50,000 income, you are eligible to get this funding. That is the fact.

Majority of the people Madam Speaker, have had their hardware delivered, majority of the people have built their homes and majority of the people are enjoying those facilities that we had provided under the Help for Homes Initiative. That is a fact, Madam Speaker, and I am answering the question..

Madam Speaker, the reality is that this is a factual situation on the ground.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General is misleading the House because people right now in the rural areas, in villages, are living in temporary houses. How can he say that the previous governments only looked after villagers? Villagers right now are still living in tents and in temporary shelter, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That was not a point of order, it does not qualify. A point of order is not on the content of the speech, it is only on the rules and procedures of the House. Therefore, I now give the floor to the Honourable Howard Politini.

Nadi Watershed Management Project
(Question No. 30/2018)

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Waterways enlighten the House about the Nadi Watershed Management Project that is being implemented in Nadi?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Waterways.

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Waterways).- Madam Speaker, I rise to answer the question asked by the Honourable Member and I want to thank him for asking that question, a good diversion from the discussions that we just had.

Madam Speaker, watershed is a technical term but let me give a simple definition of watershed. It is a collection bed of water for waterways, so all the water that you see in the waterways, in the various river tributaries, are basically collected in the watershed. So the ability to get water in the waterways depends on how we manage this watershed which is the collection point for water.

Madam Speaker, Watershed Management is a process to maintain the balance between this ecosystem of watershed that we have. The major objective of Watershed Management is to protect the natural resources such as land, soil, water, wild life and vegetation from natural disasters and human activity. So unless and until we protect and manage this watershed, we will not have enough water for the waterways and therefore the downstream benefits and downstream activities that depend on the waterways.

Madam Speaker, increasing population puts numerous pressure on land utilisation, forcing to use fragile, marginal land which are susceptible to management through human activities and subject to degradation. Watersheds can be categorised into the lower and upper watershed. We have the watershed like upstream which is the initial starting collection point and we also have watersheds downstream, the flood plains. The watershed that lies downstream in the plains is subjected to flooding, these are areas where you not only have collection point but also have waterways spilling over and now affecting these flood plains. So, Madam Speaker, that is the point that is in place, downstream where we undertake various flood mitigation activities such as river dredging, flood control measures, dikes and floodgates et cetera.

Madam Speaker, the upper catchment lies upstream along the valleys and rolling hills up to the ridges which contribute to the filling up or flooding of the waterways. In the upper catchment we have the retention dams and reservoirs which are required to regulate the water flows. Madam Speaker, what we do upstream is to smooth down the flow of water in cases where there is a major rain and suddenly the volume of water increases in the waterways, to develop or construct retention dams. Upstream in various major rivers, for example, in the case of Nadi, the Nawaka River and the Nadi River. What we do upstream is to construct a dam so when there is a major rainfall, the water collects in the dam and that slows down the initial gushing of water and flooding the downstream flood plain. At the moment what we have is four retention dams in the Nadi Watershed, two in the Nadi River upstream and two in Nawaka River.

Madam Speaker, in the last two to three decades, the population in Nadi has increased substantially and the increase in population has led to the expansion of the township and residential settlements, hence increasing pressure on limited land in the flood plains and rolling hills available for cultivation of agriculture. There are two effects that lead to land degradation which affects the management of watersheds in the lower level. The scarcity and continued management of land and soil degradation, marine life and water resources pose a serious threat to food security, human health,

environment and sustainable agriculture development. The pressure to conserve natural resources has increased due to rapid population growth, watershed destruction and land degradation.

Madam Speaker, they say there is a lot of pressure both upstream and downstream. Upstream in terms of two effects, one is conversion of the natural forest into agriculture land, and second is deforestation which is logging. Both of these two activities contributes to the destruction of the natural watershed which is the collection point of water for the waterways. Downstream is basically land degradation due to conversion of natural forest into agricultural land. These are the two challenges that we are facing, one is the effect of deforestation on watershed which is the collection point for water, and the second is conversion of natural forest into agricultural land. Both of these two are inevitable; there will be logging and there will be people moving to new land for agriculture production. The question and the challenge is how do we sustain this practice? Allow those two and at the same time ensure that these two activities does not pose a real threat of reducing the volume of water in our waterways which is contributing or assisting us in terms of hydro-electricity production, water for household sector and water for the agriculture sector.

Madam Speaker, quite a bit of studies have been done particularly by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) with respect to Nadi Watershed, and because of this the first project was to construct a retention dam. The major task that needs to be undertaken going forward is to undertake major awareness and education campaigns amongst the population both upstream and downstream, not only in Nadi but in all the areas of Fiji about how do we balance between the need to one, logging and the need to convert natural watersheds, natural forests land into agricultural land without affecting the volume of water in our waterways. Madam Speaker, this is a project that Ministry of Waterways is now liaising with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Lands to ensure that we manage our watersheds not only for the current generation but future Fijians in the country.

Madam Speaker, the overall objective of the project is one to regulate the speed it flows, river discharge capacities and control excessive run-off, reducing flood damage. Number two is to optimise the usage of surplus water for social and economic growth, increasing agriculture productions without compromising on growth in development, to provide water for domestic and irrigation purposes, increase water units and maintain water quality, to ensure sustainable use of natural resources, to achieve sound ecological natural balance with the watershed region. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I have heard this about the 20th time. The simple question is when will this be completed so as to avoid flooding in Nadi?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, these things cannot be done overnight. Unfortunately, my friend there who has a law background needs to understand that we no longer want to do firefighting kind of approach. This is a bigger project. Next week I want to present a detailed statement of the entire Nadi River project which will provide a comprehensive data on all the aspects of the project that we are undertaking that will lead to minimisation of overflow of the Nadi River; that is an issue in Nadi now. Retention dam is just one component of managing the flooding issue in Nadi. There are other things that we are planning to do. It is not a one year project, it is not a \$1 million or \$10 million project. This is something that I am going to explain next week in a statement, so please just hold on and relax a bit. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister for his explanation. How much area would be used for this Watershed and on the implementation, how will it affect the future flooding in the Nadi area?

HON SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, if you are only talking about Nadi, we are looking at the entire area of Nadarivatu, Nawaka that is feeding into the two rivers in Nadi. It is a project which will take about three to four years to implement because it involves a lot of work, a lot of projects and a lot of engineering work. As I said, it is not a \$10 million or \$20 million project. We have a major study done by JICA and we are implementing that, I am going to provide a detailed outline of that next week.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker, we know the initial intention of building watersheds is to control flooding but in any event can the Minister advice this House that the Watershed Management Project is undergoing the necessary robust socio-economic impact assessment processes that should accompany EIAs?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, we have passed that stage. I will pass the Honourable Member a copy of the entire JICA Report which has undertaken the Environmental Impact Assessment and also a detailed study of what is happening in the upstream and downstream. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI. - Thank you Madam Speaker. Sixteen percent of land in Fiji is flat lands and you know Nadi is more towards development in terms of tourism, so watershed will take a lot of prime areas. My question is whether the Minister has considered dredging at the mouth of Nadi River because the amount of water that comes from the hills has to flow out also for the dams that is on the stop gate. The question is whether he has considered dredging the mouth of Nadi River? Mangroves is an adapting factor in flood mitigation, so there are a lot of issues in here, whether you have taken that into consideration Honourable Minister?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, sometimes I get a bit worried about what are they doing here, are they listening to what we are contributing from this side?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- They are sleeping.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I had explained that the entire Nadi River Project has various components. What I said about the retention dam is the upstream, it is just one component. A 12 retention dam needs to be constructed, out of that we have completed four. But it does not only include the retention dam there are several other components and dredging is one of them. Next week,

I am going to explain in detail not only the components and the cost implication but the timeframe as well. So of course, we have been talking about dredging a lot, we have seen tender for the Sigatoka and Penang Rivers, why not Nadi, of course, absolutely.

HON. SPEAKER.- I know give the floor to Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou.

Climate Smart Agribusiness
Question (31/2018)

HON. A. NABULIVOU asked the Government upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services elaborate on the Ministry's stand initiating climate smart agribusiness?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

It is a very important issue as alluded to by the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services yesterday on food and nutrition security. In answering the question this morning, I will probably touch more on food security. Again, climate change affects us seriously and Fiji is amongst the most vulnerable and most affected regions, and that is obvious, Madam Speaker. The answer to the question this morning is when we look at our climate smart actions we will look at three main drivers of agribusiness, Research; Production; and Marketing. That is the cycle in the agribusiness.

Let me also acknowledge all our partners who worked with us in these areas. Fiji is not working in isolation, Madam Speaker. Within the region we work very closely with the Pacific Community, SPC and the Australian Council for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) and of course with the Food and Agriculture Organisation out of the Regional Office in Bangkok and of course their headquarters in Rome.

Madam Speaker, very quickly on research, research is very critical and of course the main aim behind research is to look at the selection of varieties and bridge with resilient characteristics. For this, Madam Speaker, I would say and for the benefit of all Fijians particular the farmers that we have to clearly identify what is for our food security and what is for our economic benefits. When we are doing research particularly with participatory research it is not only about the blend of science, it is not only about the traditional knowledge and the practises but also the socio-economic issues attached to it as well. I have talked about our food security and what is for our economic purposes as well because we have observed for agriculture in Fiji some of our farmers are quickly opting for varieties for economic purposes but they have neglected food security issues.

We have our traditional crops and this is where most of the research is focusing on as well. I will give few examples, *tivoli*, *via* and *dalo nitana*, these are very important and of course yams as well, not many farmers are planting yams now, unfortunately. These are very important crops for food security and will do us a lot of favour when disasters strike us.

At the same time we have also looked at varieties for economic gains. I will not go into the details but if we have been following some of the work undertaken by Agriculture, we have released a few varieties as well, Madam Speaker, about two tomato varieties, one guava variety named the Green Pearl. These are some of the new researches that will also bring us economic gains in as far as the agribusiness is concerned. But the focus of the research as I have stated is about resilient dates which will adapt well to the conditions in Fiji.

On production, Madam Speaker, very quickly. Sustainable and management practices is very important and this involves a lot of things particularly on soil conservation. Soil conservation is very critical because soil is a good carbon sink and of course simple with the use of compost we can improve the health and the condition of our soil.

Likewise, on the use of technology when we are talking about climate smart agribusiness, the introduction of new technology as well is very critical particularly during extreme weather conditions and of course during normal season as well. There is a big demand now for irrigation but how do we utilise the water sources, these are the various things that come under the sustainable management practices and of course soil conservation as well.

Madam Speaker, waste management is very critical. In agriculture there is a lot of solid waste and there is a lot of liquid waste as well. For solid waste I have talked about composting, that is a very good example of how we can better utilise solid waste so that we can reduce our carbon footprints and of course reduce the cost of production as well and increase the profit margin for our farmers. Likewise in solid waste, methane is one of the gases that is emitted out of most of the waste particularly animal dung, Madam Speaker, and the conversion of that methane so that it can be utilised is essential and of course there are a lot of projects undertaken as well by the Ministry in that regard.

Very quickly on infrastructure, resilient infrastructure is very critical. If you look at the statistics during *TC Winston*, we have a lot of infrastructure damage and this is something that we need to work on particularly, pack houses, storage sheds, and including the barns and the piggery sheds. These are all essential if we are to maintain that climate smart resilient agribusiness.

Most importantly, Madam Speaker, apart from food security, markets is important for Agriculture and agribusiness. We are looking at the marketing aspect of it as well and aggressively in market research. This is one initiative particularly to support the climate smart agribusiness approach is between the Minister for Trade and the Ministry for Agriculture. We are jointly organising an organic standard for Fiji which hopefully will go to Cabinet very soon. Those are some of the initiatives we are undertaking in as far as climate smart agribusiness is concerned Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister inform the House how many climate smart agribusiness are actually operating in Fiji, what do they do to qualify to be called Climate Smart Agribusiness?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I do not have the statistics, I can provide the Honourable Member, if he so wishes. Let me assure the Honourable Member and all Fijians that we are serious about climate smart approaches, and of course it starts from schools and goes to the communities so we are taking all the necessary steps to address this issue. Of course, we can provide the statistics later.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, any question to do with statistics it is better to put it in as a written question rather than just giving the question like this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Agriculture is still only 10 to 12 percent of GDP. If I can just go back to two years ago, there was a very passionate presentation by the Honourable Minister on an agricultural revolution. He is a little subdued today, but can he tell us where we are with the revolution that he promised two years ago?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I will provide a Ministerial Statement next week but as I have stated already, contribution to GDP probably people see it is decreasing but if you look at the figures, Agriculture's contribution is increasing. I will present that next week, Madam Speaker. Agriculture is doing well and of course that is the future of our economy and of course we need to get it better organized and we will present it next week.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister talked about communities as an integral part of this smart agribusiness. Can the Minister inform this House whether there is a strong Youth and Women prioritisation of the smart agribusiness initiatives?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Can the Honourable Member repeat the question, Madam Speaker.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister talked about the community participation as an integral part of this initiative, can the Honourable Minister inform this House whether there is a strong Women and Youth prioritisation of this smart agribusiness initiatives?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Again, it will be part of my statement next week. We are about to lodge the "Women in Agriculture" initiative consistent with CEDAW Resolution 1325 of the United Nations. The Agriculture is going to address that.

Women participation, Madam Speaker, we have very good examples of very successful women farmers. Of course most recently we have the Women in Dairy in Tailevu and of course in Naitasiri, these are perfect examples of our women heavily involved. Definitely we involve all the communities and one of the initiatives under the Policy Agenda that we have developed in 2014 is the introduction of farmer schools. These are not schools where necessarily they come into classrooms, but these are on pilot farms who are very successful and we can have training, capacity building so that we can improve on the agricultural practices. Women play a very important role in this and definitely we are taking that seriously, thus the launching soon of the "*Women in Agriculture*" initiative. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now, I give the floor to Honourable Parmod Chand to ask his question.

HON. P. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament as to why the Ministry has not taken a major mosquito spraying campaign despite the major outbreak of dengue fever?

HON. MEMBER.- Enough mosquitoes on that side.

(Laughter)

HON. MEMBER.- The Dengue one.

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health & Medical Services).- Thank you Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for asking a very interesting question. Mosquitoes do not choose the people they bite Honourable Gavoka....

(Honourable Members interject)

Nor do flees, nor are they favourable to any geographic location where they breed.

(Laughter)

It could be in Sigatoka, Nadroga, it could be Ba, it could be anywhere.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker in response to Honourable Chand's question, chemical spraying is not the answer to Dengue or Mosquito Control. The basic and primary solution is to destroy the breeding grounds and that is what we are promoting and to keep our environment clean and again that is what we are promoting. Madam Speaker, we need to change our attitude. We need to exercise greater responsibility in taking care of our environment and destroying every place where Dengue causing mosquitoes could breed.

However, Honourable Chand, spraying has been on-going since last November in conjunction with the municipal councils. The Town Councils look after their own boundaries, Rural Authorities boundaries come under the Ministry of Health, but again in partnership with the Local Councils we have had spraying on-going. Like I said, since last November, areas we have found Dengue causing mosquito were breeding, we have been spraying and is still continuing. Like I said, spraying chemicals has its uses but it is only useful in a short term because it largely kills adult mosquitoes as well as many other useful insects that are in our environment. It does not kill the "larvae" or the "baby mosquitoes" which normally breed in stagnant water collected, I am sure you all know in empty tins, tyres, flower vases, clogged drains and gutters. I have been told that even a small spoonful of stagnant water is enough to be a breeding ground for Dengue causing mosquitoes including un-kept garages, un-kept industrial areas.

HON. F. KOYA.- Bus base.

(Honourable Members interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Yes, it could include bus base, bus garages or any place where there is overgrown grass.

(Chorus of interjections)

(Laughter)

For the information of Honourable Members when the issue about Labasa Hospital having more Dengue cases than outside was brought up on Monday, I actually got photos sent to me from people in Labasa saying that bus company garages need to clean their garages first

(Honourable Members interjects)

(Laughter)

I am not going to name that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we believe that spraying chemicals in our environment should be used with caution and in moderation as it also leads to mosquito building resistance against the effects of chemicals. Of course, it can pose to have some degree of negative impact on our environmental health.

For the information of the House, Madam Speaker, in Fiji we have close to 26 types of mosquitoes and out of that only two "*Aedes aegypti*" and "*Aedes albopictus*", cause Dengue. The rest of them are nuisance mosquitoes and they would come and bite you whether it is in the hospital or your home, whether it is in a bus, car or a public place. Only two mosquitoes will lead to Dengue Fever.

The two primary mosquitoes "*Aedes aegypti*" and "*Aedes albopictus*" while the "*albopictus*" preferred living in bushes, shrubs and long grass close to people in a more rural environment. The "*Aedes*" mosquitoes are infected by Dengue virus and when they bite a dengue infected person in 8 to 12 days the mosquitoes are able to transmit the dengue virus to another uninfected person. That person will start to have symptoms within 5 to 7 days after being bitten by the infected mosquitoes. Other interesting factor, Madam Speaker, "*Aegypti*" which is a more effective Dengue transmitter of the two mosquito species, they start feeding just before the sunrises in the morning and before the sun goes down in the evening. It is very interesting. So dawn and dusk. Like I said there are 26 species, 24 of them are nuisance. Madam Speaker, dengue fever is also identified as one of the four climate sensitive diseases in Fiji.

Again the clinical spectrum of dengue fever ranges from not having any symptoms to the symptomatic clinical cases, to the most severe ones that need hospital admission and the fatal ones at a very end of the scale, normally die.

Madam Speaker, if there is a dengue outbreak, for example, bird flu outbreak in New Zealand puts pressure on any health facility. Again, if I may go back to the Uncorrected Copy of the Daily *Hansard* for Monday 5th of March, 2018, allow me to quote:

"then we are talking about including health. You go to Labasa hospital when people come in the morning they will go back home at 3.00 p.m., 4.00 p.m. or 5.00 p.m., I am not sure what is the time limit. In the night when they come in about 6.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m., there are one or two doctors and they will continue to have problems sitting there by ...".

Madam Speaker, allow me to present about waiting times with other overseas hospitals. Though we have experienced an increase because of the dengue outbreak and the number of cases presented at our emergency department in all hospitals and our general outpatients department, I can assure the House that our target for waiting time for patients to be seen in our emergency department is a maximum of four hours, depending on the severity of the case and some even below.

Madam Speaker, this is the same as Australia and United Kingdom and less than the New Zealand Hospital Emergency Department which target 95 percent of their patients treated or discharged within six hours. They are talking about emergency department and many of the dengue patients report to general outpatient department where the waiting time is much less. On that, if I may reiterate, the only solution or the major solution to avoid being bitten by dengue mosquitoes is to destroy all breeding places, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister explain the relationship between *dengue*, Zika and *chikungunya*?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, dengue caused by *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*. These are the same mosquitoes that cause *chikungunya* and *zika*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ro Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. There are about 1,025 or 1024 cases of dengue fever for the last two months of January and February. . Given that \$1.3 million has been given to the municipal councils in urban centres by the Ministry of Waterways, and there are still a lot of littering, especially in Nasinu, as highlighted in the papers, whether a proactive approach would be to place industrial bins all over the areas and even along the highways. This can help the people to dispose their rubbish into industrial bins rather than throwing them all over the place, an attitude problem that was highlighted by the Honourable Minister. Attitude problem is caused by the economic environment. It is the environment that is provided by government that allow the people to have that type of attitude. So, as a proactive action, they should put industrial bins in locations where it can help the people to dispose their rubbish. So, my question is whether the Honourable Minister can regard this as an approach to counter dengue fever.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Yes, that could be one of the solutions. But as Ministry of Health and Medical Services we are more into creating public awareness about the need for people to be more responsible when disposing rubbish. We have a better control unit that goes around. We have our health officers going around from communities to communities. I will give one simple example; last week, we removed more than 100 tonnes of rubbish in Waituri, Nausori that was left there for 20 years. It was actually not put there by the local community but people who travelled from all places and they just used it as dumping ground. So, that is the kind of attitude that we are trying to change.

It is alright to be proactive but if we can go around to communities and talk to our people about the need for them to dispose the rubbish probably in a very responsible manner. Those travelling in

cars along highways, there is always a possibility of you taking your rubbish back home instead of dropping it wherever you see fit. I think that is what is happening now. Everywhere you go, you see people just making up an illegal dump. That is what we are trying to change. Once you guarantee that people with the wrong mind-set will actually stop their car and put their rubbish in the bin that we provide. This rubbish can be collected, taken home and disposed accordingly. What we are trying to do is to encourage rural communities.

There are a lot service providers that are willing to work with the rural communities because their rubbish collection do not fall under the municipal council boundaries. We are also talking to municipal councils if they could extend their rubbish collection services to those communities that are just on the boundary of rural and urban centres. It is working well, so, hopefully in the future, with more talks with the Rural Authority and the communities, we will be able to get people to dispose rubbish very responsibly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, can I ask the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. What is the simple solution in combating dengue?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, a simple solution for all of us in Fiji; all the adults and all the children, is to destroy the breeding grounds. Let us clean our homes, drains, compounds where you even have a spoon full of water that is stagnant.

Again, please allow me to go back. When we were in Waituri, Honourable Nath was there, one of the residents stood up and said, "so, who is going to clean the drain in front of my house. When are you coming to clean the drain?". I said, "look, we are not going to come and clean the drain. It is your responsibility". There are two or three effects of that. When you have blocked drains, it affects the road. When there is spillage off the drains, the roads are damaged. That is what we were trying to do, going down to the people. We have health teams actually reaching and knocking on every individual doors. That is what we did in Savusavu talking to villagers, settlements, this is what you have got to do, please destroy. At one time we used to bury our tins and bottles. What are we doing now? We are throwing into our rivers or drains beside our homes and what happens, Honourable Reddy, it becomes a problem for you. When the drains clog up, there is flooding and spilling of waste. So, it is everyone's responsibility, each one of us, please, let us go down to our communities and be very active in this. May be we will have to go down and show our people what we need to do. Get your knives, hose and forks, let us clean our drains.

HON. MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Of course I am doing it. I am already doing it. You do not need to see it. I am doing it, my team is doing it.

(Honourable Members interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. We will now suspend sitting. Break for refreshment and we will return at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.30 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume from where we left off and I will now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his question.

Status of Savusavu Bay Development Project
(Question No. 33/2018)

HON. RATU. K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister inform the House on the status of the Savusavu Bay Development Project and whether or not there have been objections based on the grounds of environmental exploitation against such development in the area?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Acting Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Before I speak specifically on the Savusavu Bay Development Project, let me preface my comment by saying that before any major development gets final approval, they are required under section 27 of the Environment Management Act 2005 and Regulation 3 on the Environment Management (EIA) Process Regulation 2007 to go through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This includes consultation in the community and anyone else who would be interested or affected by the proposed development.

In respect of the EIA report for the land-based development for Savusavu Bay Development, it was approved, in the year 2007 for Nawi Island Limited, who is the developer. The civil works Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) was also approved in 2007. When the scope of the development extended into the foreshore, another EIA was carried out by the developer and approved with conditions in 2016.

Madam Speaker, during both the EIA processes, several public meetings were held and concerns were raised by the public. Most of these concerns were regarding the noise during construction, traffic and navigation channels. These concerns have been incorporated into the EIA Report in the approval conditions.

Madam Speaker, having said that, the Ministry of Environment takes note of the concerns that are currently being raised by the citizenry of Savusavu and is reassessing the approval conditions in the 2016 EIA approval. Madam Speaker, one of the conditions, that the Ministry is considering and indeed it has varied, is for the developer to plant at least six hectares of mangrove for every hectare removed. This is done under Regulation 35 of the Environment Management Process Regulations 2007 which allows, Madam Speaker, for the Ministry of Environment to actually carry out variations even after the approval has been given.

Indeed those regulations give the authority to the regulator to even cancel the approvals should they find there be any fundamental breaches that have taken place after the approval has been given.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has also reassessed the environmental bond. What is the environmental bond? Regulation 32 provides for the environmental bond to be charged to the developer towards:

- a) restoration, improvement and remedial work in any area;
- b) compensation for loss or damage to property or income;
- c) preventative or remedial action necessitated by the environmental resource management impacts over a development activity or undertaking and ordered by a court under section 47 of the Act or undertaken by the Department.

It is normally calculated based on the cost of the civil works being undertaken during the project.

Once the project is completed, the amount charged will be refunded after deducting cost towards any of the above damages mentioned because as mentioned, it is a bond.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, as I mentioned, has reassessed the environmental bond and has communicated the revised bond amount to the developer. The environmental bond is calculated based on the nature, size and location of the development.

The Environmental Committee, which includes the Ministry of Environment, has been set up to monitor and ensure that all approval conditions are complied with by the developer. In any case, as earlier mentioned, Madam Speaker, if the Ministry discovers that the developer has breached any of the EIA approval conditions, the Ministry will take the necessary action which could include issuing a prohibition notice to stop operations.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will be closely monitoring all the developers, of course, not just for Savusavu Bay but developers in Fiji and will ensure sustainable development and that our environment is safeguarded at all times indeed as provided for under the Constitution. Thank you

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite supplementary questions, if any?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, Savusavu Bay is well-known for the oyster farming for the pearl industry and for this development, oyster is very susceptible to bacterial infection. Whether the pearl industry has been given the opportunity to present its case in terms of the development of Savusavu Bay?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the public consultation means public consultations. Obviously, anyone that has an interest can come and comment. I am sure Justin Hunter, who has the oyster farm, is a very vocal developer and investor. So Justin Hunter, I am sure, will, given any public opportunity, he would have made the submissions also. So as the EIA process does involve, anyone who actually wants to come and make comments, they can make comments and give their input too.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other questions, I will now invite the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask his question.

Technical Colleges in Fiji - International Recognition
(Question 34/2018)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister inform the House whether the courses offered by the Technical Colleges in Fiji are accredited and have international recognition?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, the Fiji Higher Education Commission assures us that the courses delivered by the Technical Colleges are accredited as national qualifications on the Fiji Qualifications Framework. These courses are internationally recognised. I will come to the point, there is recognition and there is accreditation, they are two separate things.

Madam Speaker, the Technical College of Fiji currently offers the following 13 National Qualifications:

- 1) National Certificate in Automotive Mechanical Engineering, Level 2;
- 2) National Certificate in Automotive Electrical Engineering, Level 2;
- 3) National Certificate in Welding and Fabrication, Level 2;
- 4) National Certificate in Body Works and Spray Painting, Level 2;
- 5) National Certificate in Electrical Fitter Mechanic, Level 2;
- 6) National Certificate in Refrigeration, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Level 2;
- 7) National Certificate in Carpentry, Level 2;
- 8) National Certificate in Cabinet Making and Joinery, Level 2;
- 9) National Certificate in Plumbing and Sheet Metal Works, Level 2;
- 10) National Certificate in Painting and Decoration, Level 2;
- 11) National Certificate in Cookery, Level 2;
- 12) National Certificate in Baking and Patisserie, Level 2;
- 13) National Certificate in Agriculture, Level 2.

Madam Speaker, due to the demand for more trade qualifications, three new national qualifications will be offered for Trimester 2 this year, and they are as follows:

- 1) National Certificate in Tiling, Level 2;
- 2) National Certificate in Block-Laying, Level 2;
- 3) National Certificate in Plastering, Level 2 (as we know we have said in this Parliament on a number of occasions, there is now a shortage of trades people in this area).

Madam Speaker, in light, of course, of the Sustainable Development Goal 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy and Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate change, the Technical College of Fiji will be offering the following national qualifications in Trimester 2 this year:

- 1) National Certificate in Sustainable Energy, Level 2;
- 2) National Certificate in Resilience, Climate Change Adaptation and Disastrous Reduction, Level 2

Madam Speaker, the national qualification offered by the Technical College of Fiji have international recognition across different countries that have the same qualification framework levels 1-10. They are not internationally accredited as the accreditation is done by the country that owns them. Different countries have different sets of accreditation.

In our case, the Fiji Higher Education Commission has accredited these qualifications. In the same way Madam Speaker, you may have a lawyer that maybe qualified in Fiji and can practice in Fiji, but when they go to New Zealand, they have to do certain additional courses to be able to get admitted to the bar there. Similarly we, for example, require for medicinal purpose when doctors come to Fiji or dentist. If they come from countries that do not necessarily meet all the qualifications or do

not have the accreditation capacity, then our local regulatory bodies will require them to do additional things or they need to present various qualifications for them to get accreditation. So, recognition and accreditation are two separate issues.

So Madam Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to say, as you know, that we recently had the Commonwealth Education Ministers meeting and the Cabinet also approved for us to join COLO: Commonwealth Open Learning Organisation which carries out life learning experiences and we have asked them together with the Australians too will reach out to them to do an assessment of our Technical Colleges to do a gap analysis because we need to constantly monitor any institution we setup. So we have asked them, in fact, I also raised it with the Minister from Australia who was here and also with the lady who heads COLO, which is the Commonwealth Open Learning Organisation to do an assessment and we hope to have some people down on the ground, at least within a month, to carry out an assessment in terms of whether the Technical Colleges are actually doing what they are supposed to be doing. What are the areas of gap that we need to identify, and going forward, what are the further areas that we can put up as courses and get further recognition and hopefully further accreditation too.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vadei.

HON. A.T.VADEI.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. The accreditation process is a very expensive exercise. I am asking the Honourable Minister whether they are going to provide the budgetary allocation and also looking at the staff, because it is a professional institute to conduct accreditation so that they can be recognised internationally.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, as explained, there are obviously accreditation by your national body, and in our case, it is the Fiji High Education Commission that actually has accredited these as national qualifications so we have accreditation at the national level. We have recognition at the international levels, I do not know which accreditation the Honourable Member is speaking about. If the Honourable Member is speaking about accreditation overseas, there are different countries with different accreditation requirements so why should we, for example, spend all our money getting accreditation from which countries?

Our national accreditation is already there. The Fiji Higher Education Commission has accredited the Fiji Qualification Framework and Madam Speaker, I am basically telling this Honourable Parliament what I have been informed by the Fiji Higher Education Commission. I have read out the list on the 13 national qualifications that has been offered by the Technical Colleges that have been accredited.

That is the point and as I have said Honourable Member, like you, we obviously want to ensure that all the institutions we do setup, in particular, in areas such as this that we need to constantly monitor and ensure that we have the best practices in place and should there be any gaps, I am sure there has always been gaps, should there be any gaps, let us carry out an independent professional assessment as opposed to the assessment by individual members of this Parliament.

So we need to carry out these assessments by internationally accredited people who can come and do the gap analysis and of course we want done soon, because we will factor any additional requirements that requires any budgetary implications to be put into place in the 2018-2019 Budget, which we hope to present in early part of June this year. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mikaele Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE .- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. I would like to seek clarification on the employment status, what about students who come out from FNU and Technical Colleges. in terms of employment opportunities for these students.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I assume the question is about what are the employment chances of people who come out of the Technical Colleges. Madam Speaker, in fact last year, I was talking to the head teacher of the Nadroga Navosa Technical College, which is in Cuvu, and what he was saying to me that a lot of people which actually, as we know many of these courses, they have their course work within the Technical College, then they go out and do the practicals, they come to do their coursework and they go out and do their practical again. He said many of the people when they actually go out, they do not come back because there is such a huge demand for these skills in particular for some, more than others.

For example, in the areas that we have identified, the things like tiling, brick laying, many of these other new areas, in particular in the construction industry, for electrical works, there is a shortage of qualified electricians in Fiji. As we said, electricians are paid \$13 an hour, welders in Suva are getting paid \$16 to \$17 an hour, brick layers are getting paid \$7, \$8 or \$9 an hour and as I mentioned, I had construction companies coming to see me and asking me, can you pass some new laws to stop people moving from one job site to the other.

The story being that, he said that I am paying someone \$7.50 an hour and he said a week later they move to another job site because the other construction company has offered him another \$1.50 an hour more. There is a shortage of people, obviously we did not make any such law, people have the freedom to change the job as and when they feel like, but it goes to show there is a shortage of skills in certain areas and therefore, there is a huge demand for them to be absorbed into the employment workforce.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, that is all very well, but what are we doing about our youths who are generally unemployed. You go into any part of Fiji in the villages or here in Suva, youths are sitting in the shop verandas doing nothing. Is there a Government programme to try and get them, motivate them to take up these skills that are now scarce?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, Madam Speaker, they can actually go to Technical Colleges and not pay any fees. We have TELS, so anyone who wants to upgrade their skills or do not have any skills, they can go and enter these technical colleges. They can do four week courses or one month courses, there can be three month courses or six months courses. Whatever is the duration of the courses being offered, they can go and do that and they do not actually have to pay any money upfront and they can get jobs. We are doing that of course, we also have various other programmes there is the YES programme and numerous other opportunities are being offered.

Of course there is unemployment and I want to reiterate that. The lowest it has been the past 20 years, 4.5 percent. So yes, of course there are people who are unemployed, there are some people who choose to be unemployed also because they are choosy about which profession they want to get

into. Some people genuinely are not employed because they do not have the skills set. These Technical Colleges that are strewn all across Fiji is precisely done for that reason, for people to be able to get access to some form of qualification because as we know, employers nowadays are also looking for people with the right qualifications and that is what we are doing.

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

Prison Services Parole Board
Question (35/2018)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government upon notice:

Can the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications confirm if the Prison Services Parole Board has been established and if not please explain why?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, there is no such thing as the Prison Services Parole Board.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to Honourable Howard Politini to ask his question. I cannot see any rationale to have a supplementary question when such a body does not exist.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General cannot be allowed to be evasive like that given that there is a Fiji Corrections Service Parole Board in the Act. The question was passed by the Business Committee and that should have been taken care of. The Honourable Minister is responsible for Fiji Corrections Service and he understand very well which Parole Board the Honourable Member is asking and he should answer that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The question was asked and an answer was given. I give the floor to Honourable Howard Politini to ask his question.

Physically Challenged Fijians
(Question No. 36/2018)

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI asked the Government, upon notice:

With the stronger recent data of Fijians living with disabilities, can the Honourable Minister inform the House on what undertakings have been carried out by her Ministry to adjust Fijians who are physically challenged?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you Madam Speaker. First I would like to wish the Honourable Members of the House a very happy International Women's Day and thank you for wearing the badge for the day.

I thank the Honourable Member for the question, particularly because this is one topic that we do not talk about often enough; the topic of disabled persons in Fiji and the initiatives that are in place by Government to assist them in their livelihoods.

Madam Speaker, recent undertakings to address disabilities in Fiji. We have a National Disability Policy from 2008 to 2018 and it is currently under review to ensure that there is an ongoing policy umbrella to look after the work that has been carried out by Government and Non-Government Organisations in this area.

You would know, Madam Speaker, that we have ratified the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) last year, which is the major step for Fiji. We also have before a Standing Committee a National Disability Bill on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Madam Speaker, for the first time our 2013 Constitution carries a provision under Section 42 specifically for persons with disabilities and out of this emanated the Bill and also the various initiatives within my Ministry and also in other ministries to look after those persons living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, further just an indication of how we have really left behind persons living with disabilities and the numerous governments before this, is that for the first time, in the Census that we just carried out last year, we had questions relating to disabilities. Up and until then we have no data nationally to tell us or to inform us on the number of persons living with disabilities in this country. The Government initiatives that are currently in place include the new disability allowances, again a new initiative in this current year to the tune of \$7.9 million to assist those persons living with disabilities with allowances which they can receive monthly. There is a budget for the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons to the tune of \$1.2 million. There is a budget for the Hilton Early Intervention Centre, again another very important service delivery institution in relation to the early detection of disabilities in our children.

Madam Speaker, during the Budget Address we have heard about the tax incentives for those employers who employ persons living with disabilities. There is a budget for making footpaths in municipality's disability friendly. There is a budget for making government offices more accessible. There is a budget for 100 percent bus fare subsidy which is again with my Ministry. Madam Speaker, a lot of initiatives are in place and one of the highlights is the Disability Allowance that started this year and it has been implemented by the Ministry. We have engaged new Project Officers to go out because of the nature of the customers we are dealing with, our teams actually go out to various areas around Fiji to register those persons living with disabilities and who are eligible for assistance under the programme.

Madam Speaker, in the last census we would have noted that over 113,595 Fijians have been noted as living at least with one functional disability. This is something that we should take cognisance of as a Parliament, as a Government and the beauty about it, when the census happened, the Government initiatives had already started. As a Government we have already ratified the Convention that would cover all initiatives, nationally from Government and also Non-Government Organisations in relation to the delivery of services to persons with disabilities. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for bringing up those issues about disability-friendly infrastructure in the country.

Madam Speaker, I think we should start with this House, it does not have facilities, and people with disabilities cannot walk up the steps to come into this Parliament. Can we start with that? Thank you.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mikaele Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just some clarification on the Honourable Minister. What about schools, are they part of this disability friendly that you are conducting?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the education system there are 43 mainstream schools that are now inclusive schools. From these 43, 24 schools are receiving Special Education Grants to ensure that students with special needs are accorded the attention they deserve.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to ask his question.

Micro & Small Business Grant (MSBG)
(Question No. 37/2018)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ asked the Government, upon notice:

It has been three years since Government launched the Micro and Small Business Grant (MSBG) initiative. Could the Honourable Minister provide an update on this initiative?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Madam Speaker, as I have actually stated earlier on in this august House last year this MSBG initiative is a very important initiative of the Fijian Government which was actually launched in 2014.

Thus, far, Madam Speaker, the initiative has assisted a total number of 17,970 recipients with an investment of about \$17.4 million. This is a very important piece of information, this support, Madam Speaker, has indirectly impacted the lives of 90,000 Fijians. And to break it down further we have assisted a total of 10,716 males and 7,210 female entrepreneurs. In terms of geographical distribution there have been 10,855 in the rural areas and 7,115 urban recipients of this particular initiative, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate the objectives and aims of this particular initiative, initially we have designed and provide grants to start-up some existing markets and small businesses and it is an integral part of the Fijian Government's overall commitment to reduce poverty by establishing sustainable livelihoods. This is achieved very simply, Madam Speaker, by providing a capital injection of up to \$1,000 to micro and small entrepreneurs and this is supplemented by the

provision of entrepreneurial skills. This support has allowed the micro and small enterprises, Madam Speaker, to boost their income capacity and to improve the quality of their lives. It is also provided with micro entrepreneurs, a platform to obviously secure further funding from commercial financial institutions.

In fact, Madam Speaker, this is again very important through very rigorous monitoring and evaluation exercise that is conducted by the Ministry, the Ministry has identified a number of successful recipients who are ready to even expand further their existing businesses.

The Ministry is also working in conjunction with FDB to assist the successful micro-entrepreneurs to grow their existing businesses and where possibly to actually diversify into other sectors. The monitoring and evaluation exercise, Madam Speaker, has just generated positive results and to date I am pleased to announce to this august House that the MSBG has recorded a resounding 80.3 percent success rate of those that have been assessed so far.

Madam Speaker, this is again very important, these results surpass most international benchmarks for nurturing sustainable businesses in the MSME sector.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also give credit to the hard work and perseverance of all of these Fijian entrepreneurs who have exceeded all expectations and delivered on the faith that the Fijian Government and the Fijian people have actually entrusted in them. As part of the Ministry's business support services also, we have continued to provide financial literacy training to all the recipients and since September last year, we have trained an additional 1,270 entrepreneurs bringing the total number of those who have received financial literacy training to about 3,711.

Madam Speaker, I will highlight some of these other ones in my Ministerial Statement, the success stories but for the time being, I hope that suffices as the answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Jilila Kumar.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Has the Ministry reviewed its processes in terms of implementing the initiative? If so, what has the Ministry done to strengthen the delivery of this initiative? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. As I mentioned earlier on this morning, Madam Speaker, we always look at reviewing our processes for everything and this is one case in point obviously. The application form for this particular thing, Madam Speaker, is now available online for downloading and printing. The application assessment process also has been reviewed and re-engineered and is now more user-friendly and convenient. The Ministry has actually conducted more and more awareness sessions on the application, procedures and requirements in both the rural and the urban areas.

The MSBG online assessment system has been developed and implemented as part of the improved assessment process. The initial assessment, all the applications, the follow up sites, validation will now be done online and the training of ministry and FDB assessors and inspectors is also taking place as we speak. Once fully implemented the system will also be able to assess, evaluate and track all current recipients and all past applications will be incorporated into this new online system.

This system will obviously enhance the service delivery by reducing cost and also time taken to actually assess the applications and to assure assistance to the beneficiaries on a timely feedback to all the applicants, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his very flowery explanation on the effectiveness of the programme, particularly in the monitoring and evaluation and if the women vendors from the Flea Market are listening right now, they will be asking what has Honourable Salote Radrodro done to their request which I had given the Honourable Minister last year. A list of those who had applied and had not got any written confirmation whatsoever as to this date. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will not lie and yes we did receive it. Madam Speaker, as I said earlier it is a continuing process and sometimes there is a bit of a wait and there is a singular reason why we have a slight delay on the actual programme. It is a big reason, it was *TC Winston* because if I may explain. We went through the programme, *TC Winston* came, and then we went through a rehabilitation programme to assist those that had been given grants and also at the same time lost that grant due to the hurricanes, so we had to give them grants again to rehabilitate themselves.

Madam Speaker, I can give the numbers at a later stage when I say something in my Ministerial Speech but that is the only reason. Honourable Member, I apologise for the slight delay but to all the ladies I do apologise for the slight delay.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Minister said that the programme is a 80.3 percent success rate. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister in regards to the 19.7 percentage that is there, the unsuccessful ones. What has the Ministry done to the failures and what measures has been put in place to address those failures in the old programme?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I was very careful when I actually said this right at the beginning when we launched this. This is a programme, obviously it would be absolutely fantastic for Fiji if we came back with a 100 percent success rate, which we always work at. However, we did say that not all of them will be successful and I think you understand that. So, 80.3 percent way above the international standards for us is a phenomenal achievement.

However, having said that, we live by what we say, we do not leave any Fijian behind. We do not leave any Fijian behind. If you by any means....

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Please just hear me out.

Majority are successful, those who are not successful...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I just told you exactly what we go through, we nurture them, we teach them, and we tell them what has gone wrong. This is a programme that assists the grassroots Fijians, Madam Speaker, and you must understand and put it into perspective.

So, that success rate is phenomenal for us and those who have not succeeded, we do not just discard them, we do not at all. There is a programme, actually the people that actually go out do look after them. Some may not want to comply with it or do it at all at the end of the day, but we do have a programme where they do get education with respect to the whole spectrum itself.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Probably on the same line also, I heard about a lady with \$1,000 who bought two pigs which costs about \$500 and to build a pan and labour costs another \$500. Those pigs have to be fed to be able to earn some money, which may take about 6 months. Is there any assistance in their programme to sustain this incubation period to be able to be successful as an entrepreneur? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, if you recall, I think I have said this time and time again. It is actually a collaboration between the Fijian citizen and the Government and it is always referred to as a leg-up as to what they are actually doing. I think you need to put that into perspective. What they get is what they requested for at the end of the day. If you are saying that we need to provide the whole spectrum, she only asked for two pigs, and she got what she asked for.

They would have made arrangements with respect to supplies for the rest of it, et cetera. If you are referring to a specific case please refer it to me and I will find out for the exact details, but that is the status of it at the end of the day. It is a leg-up which means that they also have to be doing things to help themselves when we go through this particular process. It is not, if they do ask and say, "I want to start a new business and it is confined to \$1,000 and this is all the equipment that is required" that is what they get. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar to ask his question.

Flooding in Rakiraki Town
(Question No. 38/2018)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR ask the Government upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Waterways inform the House on what plans the Ministry has in addressing the flooding faced by Rakiraki Town?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Waterways).- Thank you Madam Speaker. I want to thank Honourable Sudhakar for asking this question. It is an issue that is quite live now and have been in focus for some time.

Madam Speaker, the Rakiraki Town is situated at the Naqoro Flat in the Ra Province in the Northern Eastern part of Viti Levu and the town is subjected to two major streams, the Nakauvadra River and Penang River which is the focus of attention because it is these two rivers that is contributing to flood waters in the town area.

Also Madam Speaker, the problem is aggravated because these two rivers get connected in the Naqoro Flat area outside the town boundary. The issue is compounded because we have the Rakiraki Town there as well as the FSC Mill which is situated just beside the Penang River.

Madam Speaker, the whole area is surrounded by high mountains that rise up to 1,000 meters above mean sea level and this is where the two rivers basins are located.

Madam Speaker, the river mouth and some one kilometre inland is deposited with huge amounts of sand and silt. As I explained earlier this morning and also on Monday that upstream deforestation and land degradation due to conversion of natural forest land to agriculture, one of the negative explanatory out of that is a massive amount of soil material, silt sedimentation moves off from this side of the land area onto the waterways and comes downstream and these silt materials then reduces the capacity of the waterways to hold that water, initial volume of water that they used to hold. So that is why when some people say that these rivers never used to flood some 30-40 years ago, then why are they flooding now? Because, Madam Speaker, some 30-40 years ago that amount of sedimentation did not come down, the kinds of logging activities and agricultural activities did not take place upstream then.

So now with increased amount of agricultural activities upstream, logging and deforestation the top soil is eroded onto the waterway, comes down and fills up downstream river waterways and therefore reduces the capacity of the downstream waterways to hold the water and therefore the water overflows.

Madam Speaker, in the 2017-2018 Financial Year a budget of \$1.1 million was allocated for the dredging of the Penang River and also we will de-silt the Nakauvadra Creek and debris cleaning from Nakauvadra.

Madam Speaker, Environmental Impact Assessment has already been carried out by the environmental consulting company called Koraleqa Environmental Consultants and has been approved by the Department of Environment. Tender for dredging of the Penang River mouth was where 140,000 cubic meters of silt material needs to be removed, was advertised by the procurement office and it closed last week 28th February and engineers from the Ministry along with the Procurement Office are evaluating the tenders before it will go to the Tender Board Committee. We are looking at maybe very soon within a months' time hopefully for the tender to be given out for dredging of the Penang River.

Madam Speaker, the engineering survey of Nakauvadra River which is about a total of 3.5 kilometres that needs to be dredged as well as cleaned up. So the two activities that needs to be undertaken for the Nakauvadra Creek searched upon, Madam Speaker, the debris needs to be cleaned up. Massive amount of debris from upstream has clogged up the river, not only silt material but also debris so we need to clean-up that before any dredging work can be done. We are looking at finalising the tender documents for tendering and hopefully maybe in two weeks' time we will be able to advertise the tender for this particular river.

Madam Speaker, as I have highlighted to this House on Monday this week that we have also allocated \$212,000 to Rakiraki Town to undertake the drainage work around the town area. For the first time ever, that work has begun, they chose to tender it out because of the volume of work that was required. So that work has begun that will be utilised to:

1. Create new drains;
2. Clean up existing drains;
3. Convert the closed drains into open drains – it is easier to maintain open drains in the future.

Madam Speaker, we are proposing that in the next financial year of 2018, we wish to widen the Penang River at the mouth some 700 metre length to increase the flood discharge capacity of the Penang River. So this is part of the overall programme to fix the issue of water discharge and upgrade it to hold water by the Penang River. We are also proposing to straighten the entering portion of the Penang River, some 620 meters upstream of the widened river portion. So this will increase substantially the flood discharge and capacity of the river into the sea.

Madam Speaker, for future proposals we are considering to realign and straighten the ending portion of Nakauvadra River as well and construction of in stream flood retention dams so we are looking at two components in addition to this activity. Construction of retention dam upstream for both the Penang River and Nakauvadra River so we are looking at probably about two to three retention dams in both the rivers so that when there is a major rainfall, these retention dams should hold water and slowly release it down so that it will minimise the impact of flooding downstream as well as holding dams in downstream in the flood prone areas.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer. Will the Minister agree that the drains that existed in Rakiraki Town prior to this snap floodings, they are all blocked because of unconditional developments between the town boundaries because they were discharging it into the natural water which is the streams and rivers that you mentioned, is that a cause of flooding?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I do not think we should play the blame game. What I have said Madam Speaker, I just explained to him that there are two components, one is dealing with the river and second is the existing drains. I said that there are three things we are doing. One is to clean up the blocked drains that the Honourable Member mentioned, number two is to develop some new drains and three is to convert the closed drains into open drains. What else you want me to tell you?

HON. P. SINGH.- (Inaudible)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- We are talking about fixing the problem and you are talking about some developments that were done some years back.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other supplementary question, I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar.

Achievements of the Public Health Programmes
(Question No. 39/2018)

HON. J.N. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services highlight some achievements of the Public Health programmes within the Ministry?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for asking this question.

Madam Speaker, there is a whole range of information available on this question, I will be very brief as I intend to give a Ministerial Statement on this next week.

Firstly Honourable Members one of the public health programmes within the Ministry is the Immunisation Programmes also known as the Vaccination Programme. This is mostly targeted to children and adults and we believe this is one of the most successful programmes we have.

We worked with WHO on this, not only WHO but our other partner, UNICEF. Through this Immunisation and Vaccination Programme, we are able to ensure that fatal and often disabling diseases, such as polio, measles, just to name a few, are prevented through this vaccination.

With the assistance of the Australian Sector Support Programme, Fiji is one of the first countries in the Pacific Region to simultaneously implement vaccine for pneumonia, the rotavirus vaccine that is for infant diarrhoea and the HPV vaccine the cervical cancer programme. As a result, we should be able to reduce the occurrence of common childhood diseases and prevent adult cancer among women.

Madam Speaker, another programme that is running quite successfully in terms of public health is focussed on Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) which is currently affecting one in fifty children in Fiji. We have been able to deliver optimally lifesaving treatment to children and adults living with RHD and we have increased our capacity to detect and manage new patients through the introduction of new technologies and assistance from our development partners. As a result, the screening rates amongst school children has increased, thereby ensuring increased detection and prevention of advanced heart disease in children to prevent complications and possibly premature birth.

Madam Speaker, we are looking at home-based care and treatment advisors for NCD complicated cases who has suffered strokes and amputation, and this is looked after by our National Wellness Centre at Mataika House.

Another programme, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, as part of the Public Health Programme is the Tobacco Control and Enforcement. We have implemented various interventions that have significantly ensured reduction in the overall adult smoking prevalence rate in Fiji from 36.6 percent and this is according to the NCDs STEPS Survey to 30.8 percent. That is a decrease of 5.8 percent. We know there is a lot of work to be done in promoting awareness about the risks associated with smoking amongst our Fijians.

Madam Speaker, another programme is the Wolbachia Project. In the morning, we talked about dengue and how we can combat dengue, so the introduction of the Wolbachia Project to control Dengue, Zika and Chikungunya is again another milestone achievement for our country.

Wolbachia is a natural occurring bacteria found in many insects and if introduced in dengue-carrying virus mosquitoes, it stops the spread of dengue virus when beaten by the mosquitoes. This project is funded by DFAT and we will be initially piloted and completed in the Central Division by 31st December, 2018 and then carried out to other Divisions.

Madam Speaker, those are some and like I said, I will address the rest in my Ministerial Statement. I thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vadei?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did not see any connection between what has been mentioned and a number of hospitals visited by patients, increasing daily nowadays. So can the Honourable Minister explain what is the disconnection between what she mentioned and the increased number of patients visiting the hospitals nowadays?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I see no disconnection there. If the Honourable Member can provide statistics and figures to prove his point, I will willingly cover it in the next Ministerial debate.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Ro Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his written question.

Written Questions

Number of Workers' Complaints and Status in 2017 (Question No. 40/2018)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations inform the House on the number of complaints received from workers for the year 2017 and the status of those complaints?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to provide my answers to the question.

(Written Response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to ask his question.

Existing Number of Registered Youth Clubs (Question No. 41/2018)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports advise the House on the existing number of youth clubs registered with the Ministry and provide a breakdown of the same by district?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).- Madam Speaker, I now table my response to the question and if permitted, I am also tabling my response to Question No. 26/2018 which was asked in the House yesterday.

(Written Responses handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER. – I now call on the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata to ask his written question.

Pending Licence Applications for Gravel Extraction
(Question No. 42/2018)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources advise the House on the number of applications pending for licence to extract gravel and the cause of delay in processing each of these pending applications?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Industry, Trade, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Madam Speaker, I will table my answer at a later sitting date as provided under Standing Order 45.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his question.

Near-Miss OHS Accidents and Actual OHS Accident Reports
(Question No. 43/2018)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations inform the House on the number of near-miss OHS accidents and actual OHS accident reports received by the Occupational Health and Safety Unit for 2017 and the status of each of those cases reported?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table my response to the question.

(Written Response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to ask his second question.

Youth Exchange Programmes
(Question No. 44/2018)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports advise this House on the nature and number of youth exchange programmes undertaken by Government and the qualifications for the award of such exchange programmes?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).- Madam Speaker, I am honoured to table my answer.

(Written Response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON.SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata to ask his question.

Royalty Paid for Low Value Mineral and Materials (LVMM)
(Question No. 45/2018)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources advise the House on the total amount of royalty paid to resources owners for Low Value Minerals and Materials (LVMM) such as gravel, since the 2013 Constitution came into effect?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. I will table my answer at a later sitting date as provided under Standing Order 45.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Question time is over and it is exactly 12.30 p.m. At this point, we will adjourn the proceedings for lunch and I invite you all to join me at the Big Committee Room for the performance of two professional Guitarists and Singers from South Korea who called themselves Rio Montana.

These two have travelled throughout the world and in many countries of the world and have performed to hundreds and thousands of people. They are willing to come and perform to us, Honourable Members. I am sure we will be truly entertained by the singing and then on a high note, perhaps those of you with good voices can sing along with them.

Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, welcome to this afternoon's sitting. Before we carry on from where we left off, I would like to make a ruling on a Point of Order that was raised on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Practices of Parliament

Honourable Members, on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018, Honourable Biman Prasad had raised a point of order under Standing Order 74(1)(a) alleging a breach of Standing Orders or practices of Parliament.

Honourable Prasad alleged that the Honourable Attorney-General had misled and brought dishonour and disrepute to this august House, on Monday 5th March, 2018 while responding to a supplementary question asked by Honourable Prasad regarding the 2017 Census.

In raising the point of order, Honourable Prasad quoted from Page 321 of the Uncorrected Copy of the Daily *Hansard* and alleged that the Honourable Attorney-General had commented as follows:

“No such data was collected. He needs to understand that there has been no aggregation of data based on ethnicity under the 2000 and 2017 Census none whatsoever. They need to move away from that, they think we are hiding it, we are not hiding it. There was no collection of data.”

Honourable Prasad alleged that the points on which the Honourable Attorney-General misled Parliament and brought dishonour and disrepute to Parliament are that “there was no census done in 2000, there was a Census done in 2007, and in the 2007 Census, there is public information readily available that clearly shows the aggregation of data on ethnicity.”

In raising the point of order, Honourable Prasad sought a ruling from me whether the Honourable Attorney-General misled the House when he said that the Census was done in 2000 and that there was no aggregation of data based on ethnicity done in 2017.

I will now give my ruling on this point of order raised by the Honourable Prasad.

It is pertinent to highlight that on a previous occasion, I have ruled that deliberately misleading Parliament is a serious matter and may be viewed as contempt of Parliament. There are three elements which must be established in order to show that a Member deliberately misled Parliament. Firstly, the statement must in fact have been misleading. Secondly, the Member must have known at the time it was made that the statement was incorrect. Thirdly, in making the statement, the Member must have intended to mislead Parliament.

In making my ruling, I have not only considered the uncorrected copy of the Daily *Hansard*, but I have also watched the video of the proceeding of Parliament on Monday, 5th March, 2018. For the sake of completeness, I have also watched the video of the proceedings of Parliament for Wednesday, 7th March, 2018 when the point of order was raised by Honourable Prasad.

Having watched the actual video of the proceedings of Parliament, it is quite clear that the Uncorrected Copy of the Daily *Hansard* on Monday, 5th March, 2018 which Honourable Prasad referred to is not accurate. The video of the proceeding of Parliament on Monday, 5th March, 2018 shows that the Honourable Attorney-General actually stated as follows:

“No such data was collected. He needs to understand that there has been no aggregation of data based on ethnicity under 2017 Census, none whatsoever. They need to move away from that. They think we are hiding it, we are not hiding it. There was no collation of data.”

With respect to the first aspect of the point of order alleging that the Honourable Attorney-General misled Parliament when he said that the Census was done in 2000, the video of the proceeding of Parliament very clearly shows that the Honourable Attorney-General did not make any reference whatsoever to the 2000 Census when responding to the supplementary question by the Honourable Prasad.

Given that the Honourable Attorney-General did not refer to the 2000 Census, the first aspect of the point of order raised by the Honourable Prasad is actually flawed and incorrect. Indeed, we are all aware as a matter of fact that no Census was conducted in the year 2000.

Therefore, insofar as the first aspect of the point of order is concerned, it is my ruling that the Honourable Attorney-General did not mislead Parliament nor did he bring dishonour or disrepute to this august House.

In the second aspect of the point of order, Honourable Professor Prasad alleges that the Honourable Attorney-General misled Parliament when he said that there was no aggregation of data on ethnicity done in 2007. Again, I have watched the video of the proceedings of Parliament on Monday, 5th March, 2018 and it is clear from the video that the Uncorrected Copy of the *Daily Hansard* is not accurate. In responding to the supplementary question by Honourable Prasad, the Honourable Attorney-General did not make any reference to the 2007 Census, nor did he say at any time that there was no aggregation of data based on ethnicity done in 2017.

Therefore, the second aspect of the point of order by the Honourable Professor Prasad is also factually flawed, and it is my ruling that the Honourable Attorney-General did not mislead Parliament nor did he bring dishonour or disrepute to this august House.

In making my ruling, I have also taken note of the press statement issued by the Government Statistician on Monday, 5th March, 2018. The Government Statistician confirms that there was no reliable collection of data on ethnicity in the 2017 Census. As a result, no data on ethnicity could be accurately aggregated or released as part of the 2017 Census.

The Government Statistician has stated that whilst there was a question on ethnicity posed in the census questionnaire, during the review of the data and methods of collection, there was a number of anomalies in the way data on ethnicity was collected that severely compromised the objectivity and completeness of the data set on ethnicity. These anomalies include:

1. Many enumerators failing to ask for the respondent's ethnic background and merely assuming ethnicity of the respondent;

2. Many enumerators assuming the ethnicity of the entire household based on the ethnicity of one household member, thus failing to account for households with multiple ethnicities; and
3. Reports by many enumerators that many respondents refuse to disclose their ethnic background.

The Government Statistician has also acknowledged that fortunately, these issues did not arise in the collection of any other data assessed as part of the 2017 Census, which will be aggregated and released in due course.

The Honourable Attorney-General did not mislead Parliament at any point in time. If there are anomalies with the data on ethnicity as confirmed by the Government Statistician, then there is no such data that can be aggregated and released. In this regard, the comments made by the Honourable Attorney-General are not misleading nor does it bring dishonour or disrepute to Parliament.

As I indicated earlier, deliberately misleading Parliament is indeed a serious matter which can also be a contempt of Parliament. It is equally important that such allegations are not lightly made against any Member of Parliament and that all necessary facts are properly scrutinised by any Member who wishes to make such a serious allegation against any other Member.

Furthermore, allegations of bringing dishonour and disrepute to Parliament are very serious in nature which should not be lightly made without a proper factual basis. Examples of conducts which can be categorised as bringing dishonour and disrepute to Parliament include those statements on which the Privileges Committee has previously disciplined Members of contempt of Parliament. The comments made by the Honourable Attorney-General in response to the supplementary question asked by the Honourable Prasad cannot in any way be categorised as bringing dishonour or disrepute to Parliament.

Therefore, I rule against the point of order raised by Honourable Prasad.

We will now move on to the next Item in the Order Paper.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40, the:

1. Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications has two Ministerial Statements;
2. Minister for Employment, Productivity Industrial Relations; and
3. Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I will now call on the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to make her Statement.

Update on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms
of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to address this august House on International Women's Day to provide a brief update on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women known as CEDAW. This Convention shapes our national efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Madam Speaker, Fiji became a party to CEDAW in 1995. As a State Party, Fiji is required to submit to the CEDAW Committee a State Report every four years, to update the Committee of what we are doing on a national level to fulfil the provisions of the Convention.

On 23rd February this year, Fiji participated at the CEDAW's 69th Constructive Dialogue Session with the CEDAW Committee at the United Nations Office in Geneva. During that Dialogue, the Fijian delegation was able to clarify for the Committee, queries that they had pertaining to our obligations under CEDAW. In compiling their questions, the Committee had considered the Shadow Report which was submitted by the Coalition of NGOs in Fiji, the Report of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-discrimination Commission, and also the Committee's own concluding observations from Fiji's previous review in 2010.

Madam Speaker, by means of background and with reference to Fiji's adherence in accordance with Article 18 of the Convention, Fiji has so far submitted five Periodic State Reports since its ratification in 1995. The Government has appeared before the 23 member CEDAW Committee for the second time now since 2010, to defend State Reports against criticisms and allegations in NGO Shadow Reports, and to engage in a Constructive Dialogue with the Committee on Fiji's way forward.

In this regards, Madam Speaker, the delegation found the Constructive Dialogue most useful as it provides a third party independent review of the various national efforts we are undertaking as a Government and as a country; a review that identified opportunities for further boosting our national aim for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Madam Speaker, the Constructive Dialogue dealt with key issues in gender discourse, including:

- Non-discrimination;
- State obligations;
- Measures to accelerate equality;
- Stereotype and culture;
- Prostitution and trafficking;
- Participation in public and political life;
- International representation;
- Nationality;
- Education;
- Employment;
- Health;
- Economic empowerment;
- Rural women;
- Equality before the law;
- Marriage; and
- Family life.

Judging from the questions posed to the delegation and the discussions that followed, one would identify the issue of gender-based violence and women's participation in public and political life as two of the main areas of interest identified by the CEDAW Committee in relation to Fiji.

Madam Speaker, in preparing the State delegation for Fiji's participation at the 69th Session in Geneva, the Ministry convened a three day CEDAW Awareness Session and Mock Dialogue Workshop in January this year. This was facilitated by the SPC Regional Rights Resource Team and UN Women. I am grateful to the Resource Personnel for the enormous coaching and preparation of the team. This forum effectively equipped the Fijian delegation with knowledge and empowerment for the Constructive Dialogue.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I would like to state that it takes a concerted effort and commitment across Government and the strengthening of partnerships with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) for Fiji to comply with the principles of the Convention. The Persons of Gender focal points in Government agencies provided a strong foundation to obtain gender-related data sets in our preparation for Geneva. I am glad to share with this House, that Government agencies made huge efforts to provide data sets which were not routinely collected in the information systems. We now have a stronger Gender Desegregated Data Platform across the Civil Service, and this is a good reference point as we move forward. CEDAW work has allowed us to have this evidence-based data which will be very important in assessing the impact of gender interventions and the promotion of gender equality.

Moreover, we believe that through the coordinated efforts of the CEDAW stakeholders, the collation of Sex Desegregated Data will now become part and parcel of data collection in Government Ministries and Departments.

Madam Speaker, in my introductory statement at the 69th Session Constructive Dialogue, I highlighted fundamental areas of national development since our last reporting in 2010, which were critical for the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Fiji including, the 2013 Constitution and its unique provisions on the:

- Socio-Economic rights;
- The new electoral system and its impact on the increased participation of women in political life;
- Work of the national women's machinery and reviving of the women's Plan of Action Taskforces;
- Initiatives in addressing gender-based violence;
- Developments and programmes under the education, health, employment and economic sectors;
- Access to justice initiatives;
- Climate change mitigation and resilience programmes;
- Government initiatives on the rights of persons with disabilities and Strengthening partnerships with stakeholders; and
- Combatting trafficking and prostitution in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, in addressing the participation of women in public and political life, it is noteworthy that more women than ever before (44 in total and constituting 17.7 percent of total candidates) stood as candidates in the 2014 Elections. This translated to 14 percent of women in

Parliament after the Elections, the highest number ever for a Fijian Parliament; a first female Speaker and the Secretary General as well.

I have been advised that in all Elections since Independence, women secured fewer than 12 percent of seats in Parliament. Apart from the impact of cultural gender stereotyping and other socio-economic reasons, the low number of females in Parliament can also be attributed to the Electoral Systems that existed previously in Fiji which favoured men and further isolated female candidates from being voted into Parliament. Coupled with this is the fact that our previous Electoral Systems were race-based, favouring some communities more over others. Whilst we acknowledge that we still have some way to go for a true reflection of our national female population with their representation in Parliament, we believe that a concerted national effort for the empowerment of women across all sectors will steadily encourage the increased participation of women in political and public life,

This, Madam Speaker, is why the socio-economic rights under the 2013 Constitution is such an important platform for the empowerment of the Fijian women. The progressive realisation of those rights as we are witnessing right now in our country, will bolster the resolve of Fijian women to contribute more meaningfully in political and public space. We believe that increased access to education, better health facilities, roads, water, electricity and services will empower more women to positions of leadership in public and political life.

We also believe, Madam Speaker, that whilst temporary special measures will immediately take us to our target of gender equality in public and political life, these measures are a band aid solution which do not address the root causes of gender inequality. We believe that a more focused effort on addressing these root causes will augur well for true equality, which is sustainable in the long term.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is now preparing for her second Parliamentary Elections under the 2013 Constitution. What we need to see and encourage right now is more women candidates of merit in the line-up of political parties. Our electoral system is young, it has only been tested once and has proven to be conducive for the increase representation of women in Parliament, when coupled with continuing work by Government and the non-government sector to deal holistically with the socio-economic barriers which become an obstacle for the participation of women in the electoral process, and at all levels of decision making in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, data sets made available to us in our preparatory work show that 54 percent of the Civil Service workforce is women. The introduction of the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) by the Ministry of Civil Service, in our view, is an important step in getting rid of the gender barriers and gender stereotypical attitudes, which have existed for so long and which prevented the promotion of women to senior positions, not because they did not have the required merit, but simply because they are women.

Madam Speaker, in the area of education we can say that the secondary school retention rate for females is higher than it is for males for the year 2017. This means the girls are staying in school longer than boys, this translates to the high proportion of females taking up the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme and the National Toppers Scheme for the past four years in totality and further translates to the higher proportion of female graduates out of universities. These statistics are heartening, Madam Speaker, as they go against the anecdotal stories of girls being forced to stay out of school or being forced into early marriages to ease the burden of struggling families.

Madam Speaker, because of the huge investment by Government into the Education sector the provision of free tuition and free textbooks for all students and free transportation for qualifying students at primary and secondary level, and the ease at which a student can now access finance to get a Tertiary education. Because of all that, Madam Speaker, parents now do not have to make a choice on which of their children will have to forfeit school due to the high cost of education. We do know, Madam Speaker, that when faced with that choice it is usually the girl child who gets to stay at home because of societal nuances tying to gender stereotyping. We should celebrate the fact, Madam Speaker, that that anecdotal story is no longer our story in Fiji now.

Madam Speaker, I can say with confidence that in the past ten years under the Bainimarama-led Government and now the FijiFirst Government, Fiji has significantly progressed and developed in her legal, political, electoral and socio-economic reforms. With best practices pertaining to Government's commitment towards gender equality and women's empowerment. In a nutshell, Madam Speaker, a legal and socio-economic position of Fijian women has never been so visibly addressed in a favourable manner under any other Government and it has been under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I would like to itemise a number of key reforms to back up the statement that I have made. In 2009, the Bainimarama-led Government introduced the first Domestic Violence Law in our history which created a specific mechanism for the protection of victims of domestic violence and the prosecution of the perpetrators. The removal of the need to have the evidence of a rape victim corroborated in Court with the Crimes Act 2009 made the prosecution of this crime much easier empowering victims who are almost always women. A further amendment to the marriage age raising it to 18 years in 2009 ensured the ending of the exploitation of young girls through marriage. Prior to that amendment, Madam Speaker, the marriageable age in Fiji was 18 for boys and 16 for girls, a law we adopted from our Colonial rulers and held onto until the Bainimarama-led Government change it in 2009.

In 2012 an amendment made to the Family Law Act recognised the rights of de facto spouses in relation to property and spousal maintenance which protected particularly women who are most vulnerable when such relationships ended. In 2013, Madam Speaker, the Rural Pregnant Mothers Food Voucher Programme was initiated at the Ministry of Health and later transferred to the Ministry of Women in 2014. This programme had a two-pronged target, one, to enhance the nutrition for pregnant women and unborn babies by extension; and also to encourage pregnant women to attend monthly prenatal clinics until they give birth.

In 2014 the first ever National Women's Expo was launched in Suva bringing in women from all over Fiji to showcase and sell their handiwork. Madam Speaker, this was the first time ever that a national event of such magnitude by any Government for Fijian Women has ever been done. Last year alone this event raked in almost a \$0.5 million for the women who took part in it. In 2014, also, Madam Speaker, for the first time in the history of our country a National Gender Policy was consolidated and launched. A policy which for the first time mapped out what our national aspirations are in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women in various sectors across of Government.

Madam Speaker, with the national policy in place worked towards fulfilment of the aims of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has become more operational. Last year our first National Domestic Violence Helpline which empowers victims of domestic violence was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister working in partnership with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. This Toll Free Line of 1560 empowers victims and witnesses of domestic violence to report incidences of violence through a phone call.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is yet to receive the concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee after our review. The Ministry looks forward to closer collaboration with stakeholders and other ministries, civil society and the non-Government sector in putting together a holistic approach to addressing the envisaged concluding observations of the Committee.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry will continue to review and address the gaps in advancing gender equality on women's empowerment in Fiji and this will only be possible through cohesive efforts within the public and private sectors. Also important is the promotion of gender mainstreaming strategies at all levels of Government through the effective implementation of the National Gender Policy.

Madam Speaker, to conclude as custodian of CEDAW, the Ministry recognises that enhancing the status of women is a continuous process and remains committed to this effort. The Ministry looks forward to progress the implementation of CEDAW for the betterment of our service delivery as status for a Fijian women. I thank you, Madam Speaker, and I wish you and the Honourable Members of this House again a very fruitful International Women's Day.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for her statement. But, Madam Speaker, I must highlight that what the Honourable Minister had just presented on the development and empowerment of women are not really being successfully translated into action.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- A simple example, Madam Speaker, are those Billboards around the country right now that says "Women Empowerment", but right beside those Billboards are women in temporary vulnerable shelter selling their produce to help their families.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is wrong with that?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, because I only have five minutes to respond to a 20 minutes presentation and because today is International Women's Day and in the spirit of the theme "Press for Progress" may I request the Honourable Minister to present to this House the following Reports for consideration of the relevant Standing Committee:

1. The 5th CEDAW Periodic State Report that was presented in the 69th CEDAW Session;
2. The subsequent shadow Report by the NGO Coalition.

Madam Speaker, the CEDAW parallel report by the NGO Coalition offers a constructive critic of the Ministry's relevant legislations and their enforcement, policies and programmes, resource allocation and the implementation. It also gives a reality check on the Ministry and the Government's overall performance towards the development and empowerment of women.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, if I can use two examples from the NGO Coalition shadow report on the State Report, and I quote:

“While the Government has made investments to reduce poverty, eliminate violence and economically empower rural women there is limited desegregated data. To showcase the efficacy of the investments.”

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER. – There you are.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- “This is not surprising due to the insignificant budget dedicated for the Women Plan of Action Implementation and the lack of formalised monitoring and evaluation procedures”.

(Chorus of interjections).

Another example is on :

“The zero tolerance violence free communities. There is a need for a thorough and impartial meaning an independent organisation to come and conduct the evaluation of the results of the initiative. It is difficult to conclude that it is successful model that should be further replicated.”

Madam Speaker, on the women in politics the temporary special measure, even though we have heard from the Honourable Minister on the number of women in Parliament right now, in 2006, there were 13 women because we also had the Upper House and this is what the NGO Coalition...

(Chorus of interjections)

This is what the NGO Coalition is recommending so that the Honourable Minister for Economy can allocate more resources.

Special measures to increase women’s political participation should not be temporary. More women are needed in Parliament, in policy making bodies, in Cabinet, as well as women participating in the lowest level of decision making.

Therefore Madam Speaker, if the Honourable Minister really wants to do something positive about the International Women’s Day theme “Press For Progress” through an inclusive approach, then I call upon the Honourable Minister to table the reports in this House so that relevant committee can consider them for scrutiny and public consultation towards an analytical review of both Reports. The process would identify the gaps and make recommendations to the Ministry and NGO Coalition for implementation purposes to ensure progress in the development and empowerment of women. Thank you Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will now call on the Leader of NFP or his designate to speak in response.

HON. P. SINGH.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her Ministerial Statement. Today is a very important day in our calendar, in fact the global calendar where we celebrate International Women’s Day because they deserve a place. Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that the National Federation Party (NFP) pays homage to women in Fiji, commending and celebrating their value,

economic, political and social achievements. Fiji's history is replete with stories of our strong, resilient yet often unsung heroes of the day the real backbone of national building.

Today NFP wants to publicly pay homage to them, their valuable contributions and we call on the nation to celebrate the women in Fiji. NFP recognises that gender equality is both an important development objective in its own right as well as good development policy. We know that gender inequality can impact Fiji's productivity, income and quality of development. We therefore strongly support the Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the commitment to sustainable development goals which argue that gender quality and empowerment of women are developmental objectives in their own right.

Gender equality must be promoted to access productive resources, economic opportunity and decision making at all levels contributing to high economic productivity and wellbeing for all. Constraints that affect women in accessing productive resources by removing discriminatory labour market regulations, improving infrastructure services to improve women's access to markets and female friendly work practices. This must be removed. In this regard a Bill that will be debated later today to allow females to work underground in mines is laudable.

Gender equality does not happen automatically and must be meant to happen, and in this regard all political parties are empowering women and parties in this Parliament are no exception. The NFP has always endeavoured to put women at the forefront of leadership. We have two women National Vice Presidents who are integral members of the party's management board. We have two women on our selection committee who we are proud to say have done tremendously well.

Madam Speaker, we have confidence on popular women as our provisional candidates and the first women to represent a political party either in Parliament or Legislative Council was none other than the late Irene Jai Narayan who served as NFP member of the Legislative Council as a Member of Parliament for 21 years from 1966 to 1987.

Madam Speaker, with these words may we all continue to socially, economically and politically empower women of Fiji. Thank you very much. A very happy and good International Women's Day. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his statement.

Pacific Climate Finance Insurance Incubator - *Drua* Incubator

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker I would like to inform the Parliament about the Pacific Climate Finance Insurance Incubator also known as the *Drua* Incubator, which was launched at COP23 in Bonn, Germany, last year. The *Drua* Incubator, Madam Speaker, is an innovative financial mechanism designed to crowd in private sector finance to address the combined challenge of climate adaptation mitigation in the Pacific.

Madam Speaker, climate change continues to have an adverse impact and implications on our livelihoods, infrastructure and social services. The harsh fact is that the Pacific contributes the least to climate change but stands to lose the most. Our own experience with *TC Winston* is a sorely reminder of this vulnerability, and that actions must be taken to fortify our nation against such natural events in the future.

Madam Speaker, we cannot wait and watch as our communities and low lying Pacific neighbours get swallowed up by the sea. We cannot wait and watch as erratic weather patterns continue to reverse decades of development in a matter of hours. We must act and we must act now but this requires ingenuity, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Fiji has taken the lead to tackle the underlying causes of climate change and help built resilient communities. We are punching above our weight in the global arena to ensure our voices and our Pacific friends are heard.

A detail account of this was presented by the Honourable Prime Minister in his address on Monday. One of the initiatives of course is the *Drua* Incubator, but before discussing the details of this COP 23 initiative, please allow me to highlight a few glaring statistics and put things into perspective. The hardest hit sectors post-*TC Winston* were housing and agriculture which suffered damages amounting to \$777 million and \$542 million respectively. In fact Madam Speaker, anecdotal evidence suggest that these two sectors carry the highest likelihood of pushing people into poverty, given the vulnerability of agriculture and housing sectors to national calamities.

Significant disaster induced damages and loses can be avoided if proactive measures are taken to mainstream disaster risk reduction, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation into policy making and market base measures. Madam Speaker, once its measure is the dissemination of macro and micro level disaster insurance. Effective insurance mechanisms helps to spread out disaster risk and shift the cost of disaster recovery from households to insurance providers. Insurance providers have a greater capacity to absorb certain shocks as they are backed by reinsurance.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is in one of the most climate vulnerable regions in the world, yet only six percent of households and 17 percent of commercial properties have property insurance in Fiji. They are piece-meal insurance mechanisms in place with the agricultural sector which requires scaling up to make transformational difference.

On a regional level, Madam Speaker, insurance penetration in the Pacific is one of the lowest in the world. The mean penetration rate of non-life insurance in the Pacific is approximately 1.6 percent, which is considerably less than the global average of 2.7 percent.

Madam Speaker, a recent assessment by the Reserve Bank of Fiji indicates that conventional insurance companies have struggled to service the most vulnerable segments of society in Fiji because of limited consumer dollars and insurance products because of their unwillingness to do that, mistrust in the financial services, higher premium cost and lack of suitable distribution and pay-out channels. Reinsurance is a major problem in the Fijian market, Madam Speaker, therefore initiatives that address reinsurance management play a vital role in ensuring the insurers ability to meet these obligations and ensure its viability in capital protection.

The ability for local insurance companies to obtain reinsurance has also been an issue in Fiji. For these reasons they are recognising that addressing climate change will require innovative, high impact finance and ensure solutions involving the private sector. The Fijian Government commissioned a study in the lead-up to its COP 23 Presidency that led to the launching of the *Drua* Incubator. Technical support provided by the Asian Development Bank for this important regional initiative.

Madam Speaker, the *Drua* Incubator will accelerate the development and transformational and scalable initiatives to increase the flow of climate finance and especially from the private sector for adaptation and to deliver insurance mechanisms that meet the specific needs of Pacific Small Islands

Developing States. More importantly, the *Drua* Incubator as one of the landmark initiatives of COP23 is a regional response to the controversial issue of loss and damage.

The Fijian Presidency a few days ago was accused of failing the Region when it comes to loss and damage. This is a false accusation Madam Speaker. In fact they do not cease to exist because they ignore, our critics have deliberately chosen to ignore the progress we made at COP23 on loss and damage through the insurance resilience global partnership which should bring affordable insurance and other financial protection to millions of vulnerable people around the world.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Fiji clearing house or risk transfer connects vulnerable nations with information about access to affordable insurance. The Suva Dialogue on loss and damage agreed at COP23 will be held in April and May. Climate talks is an important forum on the next steps to be taken on this issue and we are now working on institutionalising the *Drua* Incubator so the Region as a whole can access affordable insurance products to avert the losses and damages of climate change and climate induced natural disasters.

Madam Speaker, we are delivering on our promise to every climate vulnerable country and most especially vulnerable countries in the Pacific.

Madam Speaker, from adaptation perspective the burden of disaster recovery and climate induced damages is disproportionately put on individuals and the Government. This puts undue pressure on the cost of living in the national fiscal balance. Our experience with the rebuilt efforts after *TC Winston* especially the span on Help for Homes warrants the need to actively explore innovative financing mechanism such as *Drua* Incubator.

Madam Speaker, Government spend the sum of \$127.1 million as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to assist an excess of 37,000 Fijian families to rebuild or complete their homes. This constitutes a provision of either \$1500 for damaged roof only, \$3,000 for roof and partially damaged home while \$7,000 for completely destroyed home.

Madam Speaker, we cannot continue to do what we did with *TC Winston* in the event there is another disaster with similar magnitude and given the frequency of such disasters what if we had one every year? We need to learn from our experience and prepare for the future. We need to manage unanticipated funding risks and spread out the exposure so the burden does not fall entirely on the State coffers. The *Drua* Incubator will work on addressing this issue by developing affordable, accessible, transparent and scalable insurance products administered by the private sector targeted towards the most vulnerable segments in society.

But this of course Madam Speaker, requires individuals and households to take responsibility. For example households in the uninsurable category may need to conform to certain compliance standards to access the insurance facility. We have learned from *TC Winston* that we need to raise the level of compliance with relevant building standards and codes. As part of this process along with the *Drua* Incubator we are working on an insurance product that will enable homes that comply with certain standards such as tied down for roofs to qualify for basic insurance.

For example if the person meets a very basic requirement of compliance yet has for example external tied downs, they could qualify for insurance and be entitled for example \$3,000 or \$5,000 and \$1500 in the event that the roof is damaged. In this situation the insurance company makes the pay out and the burden no longer falls on the Government.

Of course Madam Speaker, if you would have noticed in the Budget for 2017–2018 we have actually made a provision of \$1 million for the payment of premiums for those people below a particular income level. Similarly, as we are helping those families who for example earn less than \$30,000 a year we give them subsidised electricity and in terms of free medicine also below \$20,000 individually and also water too.

Similarly in order to increase the pool of people who get insured with this new product we have also allocated funding for those low income families to have some form of insurance cover. The *Drua* Incubator will not only focus on addressing climate adaptation issues but it will also work on contributing towards Green House Gas Emission reduction targets. From climate mitigation perspective Madam Speaker, the *Drua* Incubator will work on crowding in private sector investments and renewable energy products, low emission transportation and land use projects that generates genuine greenhouse gas abatement. This is expected to contribute towards country emission reduction targets in relation to the Paris Agreement. Madam Speaker, the immediate focus on the *Drua* Incubator will take stock of such existing disaster insurance mechanism and ascertain areas of improvement for affordability and indeed saleability.

In summary Madam Speaker, the *Drua* Incubator will initially focus on the following work streams;

1. Collection of appropriate data sets to allow the development of insurance products targeted towards low income households and farmers that once piloted can be scaled up to other Pacific countries.
2. Development of appropriate building standards to enable uninsured households to secure disaster insurance and become climate resilient.
3. Development of building and engineering expertise to enable the creation of informed initiatives that will crowd in private sector finance. This initiative has been made possible to seek funding of \$1 million from the Government of Luxemburg. The funding was secured in the build up to COP23 and there is a major milestone for the Fijian COP Presidency which continues to champion the plight of Small Island Development States in relation to climate change.

Madam Speaker, for effective coordination with Government agencies and the private sector Cabinet approved the *Drua* Incubator to be held with the Climate Change and International Cooperation Division of the Ministry of Economy. A specialised project management team will be set up to operationalise Incubator and will be guided by a strategic action plan that is being developed by the Ministry of Economy in the COP23 Presidency Secretariat.

Madam Speaker, the regional approach for the *Drua* Incubator is crucial to entice private sector involvement. Given the relative low population of the Pacific countries a collective regional approach will create economies of scale and give enough scale ability to financial products. Helping the private sector optimise its transaction cost and generate confidence to work with the *Drua* Incubator. Madam Speaker, numerous developmental, multilateral and bi-lateral partners have shown interest to support the on-going operations of the Incubator once it is established.

Madam Speaker, the *Drua* Incubator will complement the Fijian Government's current initiatives on disaster risk insurance especially for home insurance as mentioned earlier on. We have allocated \$1 million the National Budget for premium subsidies and we are also working with the World Bank and the IFC Madam Speaker, to launch an insurance product especially for households in the uninsurable category.

Additionally, Madam Speaker agriculture production is important to the Fijian economy and therefore we have allocated a sum of \$350,000 in this year's budget also for premium subsidies for Crop Insurance. The Reserve Bank of Fiji and the Food and Agriculture Organisation together with the Ministry of Agriculture had advanced discussions on developing a parametric crop insurance product for Fiji.

Basically, what this means, Madam Speaker, parametric insurance is for example if a particular farming area is covered for flood, if the water level in that particular area rises up to a particular level then all the farms in that area will be eligible for a pay-out. You do not go and individually assess each farm that is what you call parametric insurance. This insurance will work on trigger mechanism as highlighted and provide immediate relief to farmers in the event of disasters as we have seen recently. These initiatives Madam Speaker will be pioneer initiatives of the *Drua* Incubator.

Madam Speaker, the other point as also known as highlighted by the Honourable Prime Minister, we can see that many of the initiatives that has been launched through COP23 Presidency has Fijian phrases and terminology and this is exactly what we want to also do to populate the discourse on the climate change initiatives going on to the next few decades with these Fijian terminologies, words to be continued through so it leaves a legacy of the Fijian Presidency, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, to conclude ...

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- (Inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry? I cannot understand.

Madam Speaker, to conclude disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation and mitigation is fundamental for the long term social economic stability of Fiji and the Pacific. The *Drua* Incubator is a shining example of Fiji's resilient spirit and leadership in the face of climate change. The single biggest threat to humanity as we know it.

Madam Speaker, we take this opportunity to also thank our Honourable Prime Minister his exemplary leadership as COP23 President. He has championed the plight of Small Island States in a global arena and continues to do so through the innovative initiative such as *Drua* Incubator and much more and also as assisted by our Climate Champion the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, and you will see there will be many initiatives that will be rolled out in the next few months. With those few words Madam Speaker, thank you very much. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to reply to the statement made by the Honourable Minister. We are pleased to hear that efforts are being made on the scale to do with insurance. If you may recall Madam Speaker, before COP23 in Bonn we had highlighted this that Fiji's 20 percent on insurance was very low and the Honourable Prime Minister could not go there as President being Prime Minister of a country where insurance was negligible. We had said that before he went to Bonn. We are glad that it is happening. Obviously what we highlighted at that time, had hit home.

(Laughter)

As I said at that time, we were shocked to discover that a great majority of homes up in Namadi, those palatial homes are not insured. That is what we highlighted here in this Parliament before he went to COP 23. Do something to motivate people to take up insurance because Fiji is known to be very conservative in the way it views insurance.

We even went to the extent of suggesting that it should be made mandatory in some areas. We are so vulnerable and we know what happens during disasters like *TC Winston*. We cannot afford to leave it to the choices of individual people. We have to take leadership and the leadership that is there, that he has undertaken as president should be made locally also. The leadership to make sure the majority in this country, everyone is insured. It takes political will. That is why we question all this presidency at this international level while we do not do anything meaningful here in Fiji. It has to be mandatory. If third-party policy is mandatory to protect the people on the road and vehicles, we must also look at our own people. Most are earning low level income. I am glad that the insurance community has now come out with a bundle of policies where you can pay a dollar a week to insure your sugarcane farm. That is the kind of initiatives that we want to see in place but it has to be driven by the leadership of the day and it has been lacking but better late than never and is now happening.

Madam Speaker, let me just consider also the economics of the Pacific and Fiji. The poor people will bear the brunt of climate change. It is a given that only the wealthy countries can afford to mitigate against Climate Change. That is why I am disappointed in the way that we are driving the agenda at COP 23. We should look at the economics of the Pacific. One in particular, Madam Speaker, is our wealth in the sea. As we know we are small island nations but big Ocean States.

The northern hemisphere, China, and Japan and all those big number of people who live up there will come to our part of the world to feed themselves, to catch our fish. As of today, Pacific Fishing Company Limited (PAFCO) cannot do enough because there is a shortage of tuna. What it is, Madam Speaker, is that we do not have the boats to go out and catch and this is not only Fiji, the Solomon Island, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and everyone.

The leadership we should have shown is to lead the Pacific Island countries to find a better way to secure our resources from the sea and sell them at a premium or at the right price to the people in the North. That will create our wealth for us, wealth that will help us mitigate the effects of Climate Change because if we continue to be poor, we will always suffer from Climate Change.

There is also the research of those items that are important to us. We should have funding to fund our three universities for research into renewable energy.

I do not think enough is being done and the waves of course, the sun is being captured in some way but it could be much bigger and that is the kind of leadership, we should say, when you are at COP 23 and ensure that we do our own research here to be self-sufficient in these areas. As I say once again, if we continue to be poor, we will always suffer from Climate Change and always vulnerable to it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- All right. I now call on the leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that Luxemburg kick started this initiative with one million euros and we need to be thankful to them. We do not have any problems with the initiatives. As said by my colleague previously, it is an important issue and has been well highlighted by the Honourable Attorney-General. We also understand that this initiative is to bring leaders in finance, investment and insurance to develop and incubate this so-called transformational and scalable financial insurance

products for Pacific Islands. But I just want to raise some concerns with the view that it might be taken on board, while we are going through this initiative and to ensure as generally happens. in attempts to ensure the burden of that insurance can fall unduly on those who we may be trying to help inadvertently at the end of the day.

Madam Speaker, also the platform for incubating insurance related to Climate Change, in my view, should have been the lost damage track of the UNFCCC. I think we dropped the ball on their front but I am hoping that when the dialogue for the loss and damage takes place, which would pick up the initiative and the opportunity that we might have missed. What is being done here is a private sector-driven mechanism, and when you parcel it with the green bond initiative, I can already see consultants talking to the Reserve Bank of Fiji and we need to be careful. We must question whether our interest and those that we are trying to help at the end of the day, is being served well through those initiatives and whether those initiatives that are ultimately meant for those people are actually going to produce the results. So it is a very important concern that needs to be taken into consideration.

Madam Speaker, I also want to highlight when Fiji launched the insurance resilience global partnership in Bonn last year, there were a number of concerns that were raised by various stakeholders and participants at that conference. I think that has relevance to us and to many of the Pacific Island countries. For example, it is important to consider that global NGOs and one that I want to refer to is ActionAid International and I quote what they said, “The insurance does sometimes help people who are impacted by floods or cyclones but it will not be an option for those facing certain losses. Private companies are unlikely to sell insurance to those facing rising sea levels”. These are just some of the concerns and this is what I said that we need to be very careful in terms of the kind of product that we are ultimately going to develop and the involvement of the private sector itself so that we ensure, that we do not burden those that we are trying to help ultimately through this scheme. I do share the ActionAid International’s concern and I hope that the Government will keep this in mind when this initiative is being rolled out and when the final products are being developed and given out to those who might be affected. So these are some of the concerns, Madam Speaker, that we have and I hope these concerns will be taken on board. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to deliver his statement.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to address this House on the progress my Ministry is making on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and also raise some concern in areas that we want to focus on in relation to OHS in the interest of everyone in our country.

The importance of OHS lies around the fact that it is related to human life and human life is always important to everyone. It is important to Government, it is important to everyone in our country but it is not only important for the fact that the impact it has on human life but it has also been proven in some research provided internationally that every \$1 that you spend on safety and health has a \$2 return in positive economic benefits. So there is a strong linkage also between OHS in workplaces and in a country and economic benefits and therefore in terms of productivity.

The legislation that we have in Fiji, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1996, was basically designed to be a change agent, legislation for change and it tried to ensure that we have safe management practices in the workplaces and also have participation for both employees, employers and also the Government to be able to develop those safe work places.

Every day, internationally around the world there is around 6300 people that die every day as a result of occupational accidents or work related diseases. So this means, we have about 2.3 million deaths annually around the world. Also around the world, there are around 374 million non-fatal work related injuries and illnesses. Many of these then lead to extended absences from work because even if people do not die, if they are injured, they are either away from work, they have the issues of absenteeism and that in turn has an impact on life and productivity.

In terms of the economic cost of all of these globally, the economic burden of poor occupational safety and health practises is estimated at 3.94 percent of global GDP, almost 4 percent of GDP is lost because of these OHS issues. Around the world, there is a focus on improving OHS and here in Fiji we also have that emphasis in trying to improve the health and safety of all of the workers that we have. That is why in my Ministry, we have a lot of continued discussions with our national Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Board that is tripartite in nature, has representatives of workers, representatives of employers and also representatives of Government. So it is basically an institutionalised the *Talanoa* mechanism that we have as part of the OHS.

Within the legislation that we have, we have a focus both on pro-active measures to try to create an environment in which we can have this safe workplaces and also a whole range of reactive systems. If something goes wrong, then we have a whole system of measures, fines, penalties and so forth to try to rectify situations where things have gone wrong. So there is a range of programmes and tools that we use, trainings, awareness programmes, OHS Committees so I would like to address some of these issues.

On the proactive side, the basic philosophy of the legislation is to get the party's to become self-regulating and not for Government to be the one that is forever going around trying to regulate each party, workers to regulate themselves, employers to regulate themselves and in this way we get better regulated workplaces. One of the major tools that has been used since the implementation of the Act back in 1996, is to make it mandatory that any workplace that has at least more than 20 employees is required to have a OHS Committee, a workplace mandated Committee. These Committees then work to try to make sure that the workplaces are safe. They go and make sure that all the requirements, all the statutes are met and also they scan their own workplaces to identify where the hazards and risks are and take actions to address these.

From 2015, we have had around 940 such Committees registered and this will continue to be of a focus for the Ministry so that we can have that proactive approach. Other than having the Committees in place, there is also a focus on inspection, inspecting the kinds of things which people work to make sure that they are fully functional, well-functioning so that when people use those machines, use those equipment's, it reduces the likelihood of injuries. This would include inspections and things like plants and equipment's such as passenger's lifts, escalator's, pressure vessels and lifting equipment. Our officers go and inspect them to make sure they are up to standard and inspection of plants and machineries, this has been fluctuating over the past few years. In 2016, a total of around 7090 units were inspected and this number decreased by 286 units in 2017.

One of the challenges that we have constantly faced within the Ministry, that we are trying to address, is the challenge of high number of late reporting and non-reporting of workplace accidents at construction sites. So we require companies to report accidents. One of the problems that we have is that, a lot of these accidents are not reported or they are reported very late so it becomes very difficult to try to address them. Employers therefore need to come on board and make sure that they do report accidents or near misses when they do take place.

The third area in which there is a lot of proactive action is taking place is vetting plans, plans for buildings when there are changes to buildings, the plans need to be vetted to make sure that they have OHS compliant workplaces. In 2017, there are around 426 workplace plans that were assessed, compared to 390 workplaces plan vetted in 2016. Increase in the number, we believe, was due to the vetting of plans on the rehabilitation following the devastation caused by *TC Winston*. In terms of OHS promotions, we delivered more than 100 OHS training and awareness programmes to employers and organisations in 2017. This is training in which we are telling employees and management staff about their responsibilities, what they need to do to make sure that workplaces are safe.

The Ministry also does a lot of training on its own but it tries to build a pool of trainers that are out there in the industry who can do the training on their own so that we do not rely on our own staff but we have a larger group of people who are conducting training. So the Ministry then accredits external OHS trainers. Accreditation training will continue and it assists the Ministry in spreading the OHS gospel to all workplaces in Fiji. Over the past three years, we have accredited around 40 of these OHS trainers and this will in turn allow us to raise awareness of the importance of OHS and also the competence of those that are involved.

The Ministry also goes out and actually inspects workplaces where it is felt that there is something wrong with the machinery or how they are dealing with OHS issues and when this happens, we issue notices which require the workplaces to improve something, to reduce the occupational safety and risk in the workplace. Around 213 of these notices have been issued in the year 2017, you will be able to focus on these ones. When OHS is poor, what comes out of this is workplace injuries. Workplace injuries is always the major thing that we focus on. It continues to be a concern for my Ministry with the total of 1443 injury cases reported in 2017. This is equal to 361 lost working days per month or 4329 days lost working days for 2017 because when someone is injured, he cannot work. When he cannot work, that means he is absent, the wages still has to be paid so that is a loss of productivity in the company. That is something we need to get control of.

I have already talked about the issue of late reporting of cases and we have noticed that there have been cases that have been reported to the Ministry, but the law requires employers to report injuries within 40 days and deaths within 7 days. We are seeing quite a number of cases that are being reported to us after one or two years that makes it very difficult to address the injury and to address these cases.

In 2017 cases reported late accounted for 29 percent of recorded cases, so it is not a small percentage, it is quite a significant percent. So this is something we also need employers to take note of, and for them to report cases quickly to the Ministry. There has also been an increase in the number of compensation cases reported to us over the years as information and knowledge on rights at work has increased. So we have noticed that claims for compensation has risen as there is more awareness built up within workers. They have an ability to be able to claim for this. It is important for them, however, to claim within three years because there is only a six year time window within which each individual workers compensation case can be dealt with. In 2017 there were seven workplace deaths, in 2016 there were six, in 2015 there were 11, in 2014 there were five and 2013 there were six. The number of workplace deaths has hovered between around five to seven, except in the year 2015 when it jumped up to 11. That is also the statistics that we hope and we want to try to improve on.

There have been improvements in workplace health and safety but a lot of challenges still exist. There is still a major challenge in educating people, educating employers, educating workers and we are always encouraging employers to identify where they have risks in their place of employment and

to control the risks so you can resolve OHS issues and prevent serious accidents and deaths at the workplace.

A lot of focus in the past within my Ministry at the OHS, has been on the Occupational Safety. Now we are beginning to turn more to the issue of Occupational Health; the health of the worker himself. There has been a lot of focus on fixing the workplace, now there needs to be a lot more focus on addressing the health of that worker who is in that workplace.

It has been reported that 80 percent of deaths in the Pacific are because of NCDs. I think the Honourable Minister for Health talked earlier this week that about 30 percent of our population is obese and another 30 percent is overweight. So 60 percent, six out of 10 of all workers is either obese or overweight. A lot of these NCDs are caused by reversible things that are in our control. Part of the cause are reversible things that we can do something about. They can be reversed through healthy living, self-discipline, healthy eating and exercise.

Within the workplace programmes, there are things that we need as Employers, things that we need to address like catering standard; what kind of food are we providing in catering? Doctors always say, half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables. I think also in Parliament, half of the table should be fruits and vegetable rather than 10 percent or 15 percent. These are things that we can do within our own homes; catering standards, exercise, the need for people to move their bodies. Maybe we should stand up more during Parliament and move our bodies while listening to debates.

Stress-management, work-life balance, people can be very fit eating the right food, they are not having enough sleep, they get sick and they die. We always see cases like that. One of the important things about NCDs, it is good to see the exercise is already taking place on that side.

(Laughter)

The important thing about NCDs, it is not when you have injuries, you lose productivity because of absence. People can still be coming to work and have all the NCDs and they cannot fully function, so they are “*there*” but “*not there*”. This problem is called “*presenteeism*”. You are present but you are not fully functioning. I am looking at that side, I am not saying that you are not fully functioning, I am saying that can happen.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is now working closely with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Fiji National University, WHO, ILO to share knowledge and resources improving worker’s health which becomes very important for us.

We are now developing policies and programmes on the National Strategy on Occupational Health. Last year in 2017, we had Fiji’s first ever Occupational Health & Safety profile which was launched and as a result of that we have had a number of OHS trainings and workshops successfully held with a range of stakeholders.

There have also been Capacity-Building workshops and Occupational Hygiene. Occupational Hygiene means using science and engineering to see how we can prevent ill-health caused by the environment that people work in. A workshop on Occupational Hygiene was organised by the WHO supported by ILO and other stakeholders to train Medical Practitioners, Health Workers and OHS Inspectors on this topic of Occupational Hygiene.

There is a strong focus on the health of the workers themselves. As we all know, in terms of productivity, your Human Resource, their ability, what they can do, their time, how well they want to work, their commitment to work; this is the greater source of productivity. If they are not fully functional, if they are there but they are not there, you are not going to get the optimal output that you could get from out there.

Over and above that, over the past years, there has also been lots of emphasis on the impact of Asbestos on our lives. If you have one single strand of fibre of the asbestos that gets into your lungs, it can lead to cancer. Over the past 12 months, there has been a lot of collaboration with stakeholders on Asbestos. We have held Fiji's first ever symposium on "*Asbestos*" in December last year to teach stakeholders, to equip stakeholders with the right knowledge about asbestos.

From these meetings, we are now developing with stakeholders a draft roadmap for the elimination of asbestos in Fiji; to see how we can remove it. We have a lot of asbestos in the old buildings that we have, but I know that the new buildings that are coming up, they do not use them as insulation.

Another area there has a lot of focus on, Madam Speaker, is in the area of diving. We have developed the Diving Regulations for the diving industry that tries to make sure that those who are employed in diving, or all those that come for recreational diving, they are working in an environment where the gear is up to par so that they might not suffer injuries or die while they are diving.

We have had three consultation trainings in this particular area and this was to raise awareness in educating the Dive Employers, the Dive Operators, the suppliers of dive equipment and the owners of dive equipment and Dive Personnel in the commercial recreational and scientific Diving Industry in Fiji.

As part of our commitment, on Safety at the Workplace, we are also working with stakeholders including the Ministry of Mineral Resources on the Mining and Quarrying Industry, Occupational Safety and Hazard that we will also want to be able to target or working together with that particular Ministry.

Madam Speaker in conclusion, safe and healthy working conditions, they are not only a legal obligation; they are a moral obligation. All of us are morally bound to make sure that the places in which people are employed are safe for the people to be employed there. Not only that, they also improve economic benefits. Investment in safety and health at workplace avoids human suffering and protects our most valuable asset; human beings, the health of human beings, the physical and psychological integrity that is absolutely fundamentally important for all of us.

It also has a positive impact on the motivation of employees. If employees are working in an environment in which they know that their lives will not be harmed, there is more likely that they will give their full contribution to that workplace. If they are forever worried about getting injured, they will not be able to give fully of themselves to the workplace and as a result, productivity will not be as high as it could be. It also has a positive impact on motivational employees and therefore also on the quality of work and products, on a company's reputation and on the satisfaction level of employees, managers and customers and on economic benefits.

As I have mentioned before, international research on the return of investments in prevention proves that every dollar invested in safety and health generates a potential benefit of more than \$2 in positive economic benefits. So, investing in the health of your workers, investing in making sure that

they have a safe working environment, is not only good for that person, in the long-term it is good for employers because it has a direct bearing on the bottom line. It has a direct bearing on productivity and on the bottom line. Healthy working conditions contribute to healthy businesses and work environment.

Madam Speaker, accidents at work and occupational disease; they are not determined by fate nor are they unavoidable. They always have causes by building a strong prevention culture, these causes can be eliminated and work related accidents, harm and occupational disease can be prevented.

Later on in the month of April, we will be commemorating the World Occupational Health and Safety Day on 28th April, 2018 and I urge all Members of Parliament, Employers, Workers, members of the public watching from home to mark this date and ensure that they participate. This is an opportunity to raise awareness on OHS at the national platform and examine ways in which we can help each other in the reduction of work place accidents, diseases and deaths. I invite all Members of Parliament to take the lead in this, in terms of all the things that I have talked about, to go out there and talk about it for ourselves in the committees that we interface with. Thank you Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Now I call on the Leader of Opposition's designate to speak in response.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

I would like to thank the Honourable Minister and the Ministry for the developments that has taking place so far and the ratification of the ILO Convention on Occupational Health and Safety. It is quite alarming that some of the statistics that he has announced in the House and we thank the Ministry for what they are doing right now. But I believe, Madam Speaker, that that Conventions like Convention 161 on Occupational Health Services remain to be ratified.

Madam Speaker, the Occupation Health and Safety Act was enacted in 1996 as alluded to by the Honourable Minister and consequential of legislations and regulations were put into effect soon after, is now 22 years after the Act came into being. There are a lot of accidents and remedy cases which should provide us with a much needed information to review some of our shortfalls of the actual Act and Regulations. This an area that needs some exploration given the OHS near miss cases and accidents and the risks they continue to pose danger on the various workplaces around Fiji.

While Fiji is further developing the legal systems for occupation and health services there is less development in planning and also in practice. One of the reasons for this, maybe the lack of well-developed information systems, statistics and registration of occupational accidents, diseases and surveys of conditions of work and health of workforce.

There is also a need, Madam Speaker, to balance the development efforts by enhancing the development of Occupational Health Services and improvement of information systems in the whole sector of Occupational Health and Safety.

Madam Speaker, one of the grave concerns in the Occupational Health and Safety sector is the employer's responsibilities including duty to provide safe and healthy work environment and also to consult the workers on decisions concerning safety and health at work.

A close examination of the Act, Madam Speaker, itself makes it mandatory for employers to provide employees “wear the personal protective equipment at the workplace” but there are number of shortfalls despite the penalties being stated in Sections 18 and 19 of the Act.

- i) Employers need to provide the best protective equipment;
- ii) Policy to ensure that employees wear the personal protective equipment;
- iii) Penalising employees according to law in cases of non-compliance;
- iv) Reports prepared by the OHS Committees or representatives;
- v) The risk mitigation practices and procedures; and
- vi) Policy of its actual implementation of workplaces to be safe and secure.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to refer to a situation such as the Kinoya Treatment Plant where workers are facing great difficulty in relation to their protective equipment.

Madam Speaker, the health and ability of the working population is the most important asset of a nation. All the resources of the nation are generated by human, physical, manual or mental work input irrespective of the level of technology they use.

The human work, Madam Speaker, is also the secret of the effective and productive use.

Madam Speaker, the next part of this response is the formalisation of OHS compliance, OHS committees or appointment of wages representatives in workplaces and how frequent they are visited by the OHS section of the Ministry of Labour. How many of these committees have been audited? What remedial actions have been taken to improve their performances in order to ensure that health and safety practices as ideal, practiced at our workplaces and keeping our workers in good health

Madam Speaker, it is an unaccepted norm that we have visitors to workplaces and they should be made aware the OHS policies or risk policies unless there are clear signs and instructions. I feel that the third party insurance in such cases shall be considered and there are many workplaces where such policies securing themselves from the issue of liability arising out when neglect of use of care.

Madam Speaker, the OHS regulation is involved with time and development of industries, the spirit of workers, collective bargaining and the need to care about the safety and health of human resources.

The British Government has done its best to bring us this far. This government is trying very hard to do its share and a lot depends on how the future government will grapple with the subject in the future. However, before I resume my seat, Madam Speaker, I must say that we have achieved a lot since 1996 but a lot more needs to be done, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Leader of NFP or his designate to speak in response.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and we all agree that OHS is very close to heart of every employer and all of us here in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, to begin with, in May 2016 we had moved a motion in Parliament calling for Independent Audit of Occupational Health and Safety Measures in the Fiji Sugar Corporation mills following five accidents before that. The motion was defeated with Government through the then

Employment Productivity and Industrial Relations Minister describing the accidents and deaths as accidents that could have happened anywhere.

Madam Speaker, while the issue of FSC is not relevant here, what is relevant is the issue of OHS and the operations of OHS Workplace Committees. Under the OHS Act, OHS Committees are compulsory and the independence of Workplace Committees is absolutely vital. They should always be chaired by the employee. There should be no interference whatsoever from any employer.

What concerns us, Madam Speaker, is the operational effectiveness of such Committees. The question that we asked:

- i) 1) Whether the Ministry has a record of all Workplace OHS Committees in all registered employers when there is a requirement?
- 2) Does the Ministry monitor the work of such committees by way of receiving reports on their operations and functionality?
- 3) Is the Ministry ensuring that such committees are free from any interference from the employees?
- iv) 4) Is the Ministry ensuring that complaints and issues related to OHS by committees are being taken seriously and action by the employees?

The Ministry must ensure that there is strict compliance to OHS standards by employers. Too often we see standards being compromised at workplaces particularly construction sites in terms of some failing to wear protective gear or heavy duty equipment and machinery operating beyond the noise level language and within close proximity of workers and others.

There is also a need for workplace insurance as my colleague has suggested. Separate from the normal business a general accident need to make sure that the employees normally take cover for. Workplace insurance is particularly important for outdoor construction sites whether it be buildings, roads or home renovations or even constructing a fence around the property. It is similar to the travel insurance only for the duration, the travel of a passenger. We believe this is important and urge the Government to introduce a legislation to implement this.

As regards to the hygiene and health, occupational safety. Hygiene, Madam Speaker, we agree that a good hygiene leads to good health. We have heard two lectures from the Ministry of Health and probably the Minister for Industrial Relations and we are mindful of the fact that the cost of implementing this is pretty high and we will urge the Minister to come up with solutions to complement this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Attorney General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprise, Civil Service and Communication to deliver his second statement.

Update -Performance and Outlook of the Fijian Economy
and Government's fiscal position

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I rise to provide an update on the performance and outlook of the Fijian Economy and Government's fiscal position.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian economy is on track to realise its ninth consecutive year of economic growth in 2018; unprecedented to Fijian history, Madam Speaker. Post independent history I should add.

The economy on average has grown by more than 4 percent in the last five years excluding the 0.4 percent GDP growth in 2016 post *TC Winston*.

Madam Speaker, with this buoyant performance in our economy nominal GDP per person in 2017 stood at over \$12,000 almost doubling from \$6,419 in 2006. This is the highest ever we have seen in our history. Even real GDP per capita reaches its highest ever level at around \$8,000 last year.

Many record level performances have taken place, Madam Speaker. These include foreign reserves peaked at over \$2.4 billion last year. Visitor arrivals were the highest level ever in 2017; about 842,844 visitors, almost close to our total population. Yet I see on social media some of the candidates for this year's elections are questioning that we are in no knowledge whatsoever. Tourism earnings for 2017 is again projected to reach a record level at close to \$1.8 billion which shows that yields, of course, are also increasing.

Madam Speaker, Government tax collections are the highest level despite having the lowest tax rates. We now have the lowest personal income tax rates, lowest corporate tax rates, lowest VAT rates and no dividend tax but still revenue collections continue to rise.

Corporate tax reduced to 20 percent from 31 percent to 2006; and 35 percent in 2000; income tax threshold raised to 30,000 from 8,840 in 2006 and that, of course, dropped to 9 percent.

Since 2007, Madam Speaker, over \$4.8 billion has been injected in the Education sector by Government; spending on Education in 2017 to 2018 was \$964.4 million, including \$170 million for school rehabilitation. Fiji has one of the highest education spending to GDP ratio in the region. In fact, it is more than Australia and New Zealand at this point in time.

Over \$100 million is allocated to 2017 and 2018 Budget to protect the elderly, disabled and disadvantaged through Social Protection Programmes, Madam Speaker. Only \$6 million was allocated in 1999; \$19 million in 2006; \$31 million in 2011, and today we have \$100 million allocated for this, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this has also seen the introduction of a Social Pension in 2013 introduced to those at the age of 70 years if they qualify, they got \$30 allowance then it went down to 65 years and now we pay them \$100 a month.

Madam Speaker, there are many men and women in particular in Fiji who have never worked for anyone and so when they get old, they have no social protection whatsoever in terms of pension. There are many villagers, farmers, wives, daughters of farmers, wives of villagers who have never worked formally for anyone so they do not have FNPF. These people today are looked after by us, so even if you have a couple or someone in the remote part of Kadavu, they spend all their life in the village, if both of them are now over the age of 65 years old and have never worked for anyone, they will get \$100 each a month, Madam Speaker.

We have also introduced allowances to persons with disabilities at \$90 a month. We have got Food Voucher Programmes, Madam Speaker, as highlighted earlier on in the week for rural pregnant mothers. Over \$3 billion will be spent since 2007 to improve and modernise our roads, bridges and jetties. This is more than three times of the previous governments that have spent from 1970 to 2006 in 27 years.

The current annual allocation is almost ten-fold higher than the \$55 million in 2004. Over \$1.8 billion has been allocated for Water and Energy since 2007. Upgrading old-age water and sewerage infrastructure, investing in new water sources, reducing non-revenue water leakage and increasing connection to centralised sewer system.

Madam Speaker, we have been discovering pipes, drinking pipes or water pipes that have asbestos in it; AFL with the upgrade of the airport, asbestos in it. Recently, when the Lautoka Hospital caught fire, when they dug behind the walls they found asbestos in it. All of these, Madam Speaker, cost money but the improvement in that means that we are improving our infrastructure and therefore it has direct impact on the quality of those people who work in those hospitals and those people who come to be served by that hospital.

All these impressive performance, Madam Speaker, is largely attributed to the various political, economic and financial reforms and well-designed policies introduced by the Bainimarama Government and then, of course, under the FijiFirst Government under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, we talked about shared prosperity. We have heard from the Opposition side, Honourable Gavoka has said it again yesterday that ordinary Fijians are not benefiting from this unprecedented growth, Madam Speaker, but every day people are telling us that their lives and living standards have improved and indeed they have and the statistics shows that, the statistics show that, Madam Speaker.

Let me elucidate further, that many daily experiences we now take for granted is in fact reflecting the prosperity that we are all now enjoying. Any honest Fijian, Madam Speaker, would tell you that they are better off now than they were 10 years ago. No person with integrity will refute this fact. We now have, Madam Speaker, the general indicators of how our country is doing and I will get into items such as food items later on.

There are many more Fijian households now, for example, that own cars. The volume of travelling within the county and outbound, sea, air, land has significantly increased. In fact, the popularity in rise in number of international franchise in Fiji has also increased. In every neighbourhood and street you will find new homes being built or refurbished, new apartment buildings, new offices and various other factories, warehouses, et cetera, being built. It goes to show that there is confidence, it goes to show that when you have new constructions being built, you also have new jobs being created, Madam Speaker.

We now have more Fijians spending on what may be called “luxury items” such as cinemas, entertainment, recreational centres, coffee shops, malls, retail stores. We also have, Madam Speaker, at the same time being aided and abetted by initiatives such as \$1,000 grant through the Micro and Small Business Enterprises that has boosted the SME sector and therefore giving sustainable livelihoods. It also goes to show when you have all these places filled up, then more people are spending, and when people are spending more it means they have access to more finance.

Unemployment, Madam Speaker, is at a 20-year low of 4.5 percent, and income inequality has declined as measured by the Gini coefficient. Let me quote from the latest IMF Article full report that was released recently and I quote:

“Fiji’s income inequality has declined in the last 15 years” and it is attributed “to improvements in the social safety the social safety net and in employment”.

Madam Speaker, let me also clarify the issue of cost of living which unfortunately has been highly politicised. The reality is that, no other government introduced the bold policies that the FijiFirst Government has implemented to deal with the everyday bread and butter issues and prudently manage the economy. Our policies have a direct impact in the lives of Fijians, families no longer have to pay for school fees for the children because we have made education free, they do not even pay for students' transportation or text books. Medicine, electricity and water are either free or subsidised.

Anyone earning less than \$30,000 does not have to pay income tax. We have lowered the VAT rate to 9 percent and removed zero-rated items. RBF has confirmed that the reduction in VAT will reduce overall costs to citizens by 4.5 percent and food costs by 0.4 percent.

We have also reduced, Madam Speaker, the fiscal duties of many items. In 2012 they reduced duties from 32 percent to 5 percent on cauliflower, carrots, peas, beans, mushrooms, peanuts, capsicum, olives, sweet corn, lentils, chickpeas, all of these imported items.

In 2014, duty of food supplements, baby feeding bottles, adult sanitary diapers reduced from 32 percent to 0 percent.

In 2016, reduced duty on sewing machines and parts, a day old chicks from 5 percent to 0 percent; fertile eggs from 32 to 0 percent, why? Because we are growing the poultry industry. Why are we reducing duty on sewing machines, so that women can actually buy these machines and create livelihoods for themselves?

Tea, from 15 percent to 5 percent; new tyres from 32 percent to 5 percent; giving people cheaper access to new facility, new tyres so that they can run their cars well, reduce accident costs; bicycle, 5 percent to 0 percent; underpants and briefs, from 32 percent to 5 percent; baby garments from 32 percent to 5 percent; deodorants, wireless modems, fabrics, zero-rated duties, why, Madam Speaker? Because we do not survive only on those five or six items that the Opposition seems to talk about. When you live as a human being, you also need things other than flour and cooking oil. You need toothpaste, deodorants, sanitary pads, clothes, access to other facilities that will actually help you and encourage you to drive more income levels for your own personal selves.

In the 2017 and 2018 Budget, duty in energy bars reduced from 32 percent to 5 percent; towels from 32 percent to 15 percent; baby cots, baby shoes, 32 percent to 5 percent; baby wipes, 32 percent to 0 percent, why? Fifty percent of our population, Madam Speaker, are below the age of 27. When you have a young population it means we will have more pregnancies, people are more fertile, they will give birth and so we need to be able to reduce the cost for them to raise their children, Madam Speaker.

Duty of new cars, new engines for motor vehicles from 15 percent to 5 percent; imported sardines, 32 percent to 15 percent, and various other items, Madam Speaker, where the duties were reduced. Sorry, I have been corrected, only the women of young people will give birth not men. We have zero rated duty on butter, liquid milk, powdered milk, yoghurt, cheese et cetera. Madam Speaker, the food items not produced in Fiji attract either zero or very low duty, things like, onions, garlic, potatoes, cooking oil, tea, baby foods, nuts, grapes, avocado, apple, pear, orange, mandarin, peach, plum, kiwifruit, strawberries the whole shebang.

Madam Speaker, the cost of production of food locally has also come down. Before *Cyclone Winston* you would have seen the cost of, for example, products like, *dalo* came down because of the initiatives by the Ministry of Agriculture, the assistance provided by the respective ministries:

Industry and Trade, Agriculture and Rural Maritime Development, they are fostering people to get more into livelihoods. The local food production has come down and therefore obviously people have cheaper access to things like even beans, tomatoes, et cetera. But we continue to hear very simplistic views from the Opposition to zero rate VAT items on 15 items you understand NFP is saying.

As we have said before, Madam Speaker, this does not treat the problem because there are also cartel operators that still fix prices with certain products and we made the announcement in the last budget, we will get them.

This is why recently, Madam Speaker, you see certain supermarkets cutting down prices substantially. The Fiji Revenue Customs Services, Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission, the Economic Intelligence Unit and the Ministry of Economy are all working behind the scenes. Madam Speaker, cereals have been reduced. Let me highlight once again, when we reduced the duty on cereals, we still found that the price was not going down because there is only one or two importers of cereal. So, they never passed on the duty reduction that we actually gave.

So people continue to pay higher prices, you can say “I will remove VAT on it”, but they will continue to pay higher prices. We need to address the problem and the problem is we need to get rid of the monopolistic position in the market which we are doing now, Madam Speaker, and the Commerce Commission will actually need to address that too. Let me reiterate what I said yesterday, we still import a large number of food items including butter where prices are actually dictated by what prevails in the global market also.

So we are not just focusing on policies to reduce prices but also increasing disposable incomes and people’s spending power. That is what is also critical, you see this is a very simplistic view - take down this but when the price keeps on going up what are you going to do to address that.

Madam Speaker, the other issue that has been talked about, I have seen some videos, I think, by some Opposition Youth Group, they are going around telling people that we are sinking into debt. Let me tell you the facts. The fiscal management Government’s debt position which the Opposition continues to harp on about, we want to correct this again today. The reality is Government’s debt to GDP ratio has declined from 56 percent in 2010 to 45.6 percent at the end of the 2016- 2017 financial year which is July, 2017.

This is the lowest level of debt to GDP ratio in the last 15 years since 2003. Anyone can verify this, this is a marked reduction of around 10 percent in just over six years. Even the IMF has acknowledged our track record and commitment to fiscal prudence. Let me quote from the latest IMF Article 4 Report that was recently released and I quote:

“The downward trajectory in the public debt to GDP ratio from around 56 percent in 2010 to 46 percent at the end of fiscal year 2016-2017 is indicative of the authority’s commitment to fiscal discipline and sustainability”.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has been committed to prudent financial management by maintaining relatively low fiscal deficit. On average fiscal deficit in the last 10 years has been around 2 percent of GDP. A strong economy together with low fiscal deficit has ensured debt sustainability with reducing debt to GDP ratio over the years. This statement by then validates that Government’s debt policy and debt position are sound and sustainable. Our debt position would be much lower if not for *TC Winston* in 2016.

The Government in total spent around \$418 million for both 2016 and 2017 and 2017-2018 Budget on *TC Winston* Rehabilitation and Reconstruction cost. We continue to be mindful of the foreign exchange risk associated with offshore liabilities. The Government has set a benchmark of 70 to 30, in other words 70 percent of our debt should be onshore and 30 percent should offshore plus or minus 5 percent. And Madam Speaker, this mix is a good mix. In addition, the foreign debt as a proportion to GDP is less than 13 percent.

Madam Speaker, borrowings for Capital Expenditure. Let me highlight some interesting statistics on investment of borrowing for capital expenditure. It is very important. Previous governments from 1980 to 2006 which is 26 years, spent around \$3.5 billion in capital expenditure and increased debt by around \$2.6 billion. I will repeat that, previous governments from 1980 to 2006 which is 26 years, spent around \$3.5 billion in capital expenditure and increased debt by around \$2.6 billion. However, the Bainimarama and the FijiFirst Government from 2007 to this financial year, a span of 11 years will have spent over \$7 billion increasing the nominal debt by around \$2.5 billion.

For this, in the 26 years prior to 2007, for every dollar of CAPEX, around 76 cents was borrowed. Every dollar of CAPEX from that period around 76 cents was borrowed on the contrary in the last seven years for every dollar of CAPEX, only 33 cents was borrowed. Why? Madam Speaker, because the rest is financed by the large operating savings.

When we save money, we put it back into the economy of building the economy up, building the productive capacities of our people.

(Inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No matter how much of the concoction you and your academics at USP might do, it does not work. The Government's spend is low as previous Government's and capital expenditure we would have actually repaid our debts by now.

So, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has been spending to raise the productive capacity of the Fijian economy and ensure that every Fijian have access to proper road, bridges, jetties, electricity, clean water, education, health and legal services. That is why we have the best capital expenditure mix at 41 percent to total expenditure. We are also making huge investments for the long term future of the country. In sectors like ICT; cable laying at the moment is continuing to Vanua Levu. We have liberalised the telecommunication sector, digital TV, tele-centres, back in processing; we are laying the platform to transform Fiji.

Madam Speaker, over the years the Government has also been registering large operating surplus of close to 6 percent to 8 percent of GDP with all borrowings directed towards capital spending. Capital spending has increased, thus improvements in capital operating mix together with steady growth in revenue collections. The impressive Fijian growth story has not stopped here. This is just a trailer presented by the FijiFirst Government under the very strong leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister. We have much better things for Fijians in years to come.

Madam Speaker, we have laid our collective vision in the 20-year and five year development plans which all of you have been given. That was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister in Bonn last year and received huge accolades in respect to transforming Fiji towards a united prosperous inclusive and progressive modern nation. Of course you have all received the copies I sent, please go to www.economy.gov.fj, www.fiji.gov.fj, you will find the development plan. You can also do word

searches online, for example, if a particular topic you may be interested in tourism, you can do a word search and pull out everything that relates to tourism.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments, I would like to once again say this is a brief to this Parliament regarding the economic position of Government and our fiscal position. Thank you. .

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to deliver her response.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In replying to the Ministerial Statement let me just start by stating that this side of the House holds a strong view that the economic growth claimed by the Honourable Minister for Economy this afternoon is a fallacy and it is not a reflection of reality of everyday living by our people. Some may choose to adopt and believe the Honourable Minister but the Opposition is certain that the truth is hard to ignore.

Madam Speaker, my task is to represent the people of this nation and state things as they are. It will be amiss of me not to acknowledge the development and services that have been extended to our people by the FijiFirst Government. But we on this side of the House obviously hold the view that it is not enough, it is also not evenly distributed and enjoyed. Madam Speaker, the logic is simple. In case you cannot convince, then you confuse and that is exactly what has been done in the case with the other side of the House.

The GDP, Madam Speaker, has its own limitation, it does not account for those who are unemployed or retired nor does it account for those living below the poverty line and those still in tents and in caves due to no fault of their own, because we have the Government in office which has miserably failed to help them rebuild their lives more than two years after *TC Winston*.

We strongly submit that the GDP cannot and should not be used alone as a measuring tape or yardstick to ascertain real economic growth. Taken on its own, the GDP is an incomplete measure of the many facets of our modern economy. GDP can increase, following a major disaster, Madam Speaker, like the *TC Winston* where rebuilding efforts might boost the GDP. This is because GDP is very susceptible to the broken window fallacy, false signals of rising prosperity when obvious destructions have taken place.

Papua New Guinea, Madam Speaker, recorded 21 percent rise in its GDP in the recent past but the lives of the people has not improved. Similarly, the notion that the GDP growth in Fiji has resulted into the improvement of the quality of life and standard of living of the people of Fiji is unfair, unjustified, untrue, unsubstantiated, unqualified and a fallacy.

Madam Speaker, we cannot deny that we have experienced poor economic management, resulting into huge public debt. Just recently, the Honourable Minister stated that the calculation of the debt level has been stated to be equivalent to 45.6 percent of Fiji's GDP. One can only imagine what this means, Madam Speaker, for our cost of living and future sustainability.

Madam Speaker, the latest Reserve Bank of Fiji's Economic Review in January of this year, also envisages continued high cost of living. It acknowledges that inflation has risen to 2.8 percent or 2.6 percent recorded in December 2017.

Madam Speaker, let us open our eyes to the truth. All citizens of this nation deserve equal enjoyment of national development. For example, people in rural areas like those in Waibasaga Village

in Naitasiri are still crossing the Wainimala River by foot because their Irish Crossing they were promised after Election in 2014 remains a myth. Similarly, those in Natawa Village in Nadi, following the major floods of 2009 remained without a bridge. I believe, Madam Speaker, the villagers of the *Tikina* of Noimalu and villagers of Nawaisomo in Naitasiri have publically decried in the media that should they have no access to roads as promised, they will change their vote, hopefully to this side of the House.

Madam Speaker, television access like *Fiji TV* and *FBC TV* remains inaccessible to most part of the rural areas and outlying islands. They can only access *Sky Pacific* but they have to pay for it and when they do, they only watch PNG Parliamentary Sessions and other overseas programmes, instead of watching the Fiji Parliamentary Session that is happening right now and other current affairs including, news. Even Vodafone and mobile accessibility remains far from reality, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me conclude by stating that I see public signage all over Fiji saying, “More students in universities than ever before”. All that comes into mind is a question of quality education over quantity.

I am encouraging the Government to listen to the Opposition annotation, it will actually assist you to take corrective actions. Dialogue with people and stop the top down approach, stop the oppressing of people, go easy on running after businesses and small people trying to make a living. The Government that listens will be judged

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement.

Madam Speaker, it is always accepted that Governments need to top up the economy and more so, they need to top up the economy just before an election so it is understandable that the Honourable Minister would give a very upbeat assessment of the economy.

One very important intriguing thing, Madam Speaker that keeps coming from the other side is about what happened in the past. Sometimes I get the impression that nothing happened in the past - no bridges were built, no roads were built, no water supply was given.

Madam Speaker, some things happen, despite who is in Government. Governments, over a period of time, need to build roads and bridges, they need to increase social welfare, they need to review policies and we accept the fact that this Government has done quite a bit on social policies. And I want to say to the people of this country, Madam Speaker, I know some people are going around and saying; “Ah, if NFP comes into Government” or “SODELPA comes into Government” or “if there is a new Government, we might lose the social welfare, we might lose this.” I do not think, Madam Speaker, any government is going to disrupt and take away social policies and social welfare to the people who are already getting it. I mean, it would be ridiculous, Madam Speaker, of any Government to do that.

Madam Speaker, let me just come back to this idea of past GDP growth. While I acknowledge there has been growth over the last five years, let me just give you some figures, the average real growth.

Between 1971 to 1980, Madam Speaker, we had an average growth rate of 4.8 percent. Between 1981 and 1990, we had an average growth of 2.4 percent. Between 1991 and 2000, we had an average growth of 2.5 percent. But between 2007 and 2016, we had an average growth of only 2.2 percent under the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Attorney-General.

So, yes, we acknowledge the growth in the last five years. Many assessments, Madam Speaker, would reveal to us that a lot of the things that we are doing is now a catch-up.

(Honourable A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is Reserve Bank figures, it is not my figures.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The other point I want to make, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister talked about prudent financial management. I do not agree with that. I think there has been a lot of reckless spending by this Government over the last three or four years, especially with respect to the allocation to Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), and I want to suggest to the Government that we need to seriously audit what happened over the last two or three years in terms of infrastructure spending, and whether we are actually getting value for money. I think this is very important.

The debt to GDP figures might have come down, Madam Speaker, but in terms of the actual impact on the people, I mean, this financial year alone, Madam Speaker, (this is not my figure, this is your figure) \$525 million just in repayment - interest and payment, and out of that \$525 million about \$300 million would be interest alone which means, Madam Speaker, we need about \$43 million per month.

You look at the FRA Budget, Madam Speaker, about \$653 million. So in terms of dollars, yes, we may be collecting a revenue, but I just want to say to the Honourable Minister; “Yes, the income tax may have come down but there has been a lot of indirect taxes, Madam Speaker. The VAT would have come down from 15 percent to 9 percent. When I was saying 15 percent to 10 percent, they asked; “Where will I get the money?” Remember 2014? But you did that which is acknowledged, Madam Speaker, but then 9 percent VAT was also put on seven basic items.

In any economy, Madam Speaker, when you put VAT on particular items, invariably the impact of that is felt by those in the lower income and those who need these items every week, every fortnight. So it is not necessarily a very rosy picture if you look at the last 10 years or 11 years, and a lot of what has happened is quite natural and is also a catch-up.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to have the floor.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I move, under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended, so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete all items listed in today’s Order Paper.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I call upon the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I do not have anything to say, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite debate on the motion, if any.

Parliament will now vote.

The Question is that under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended, so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete all the Items as listed in today's Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Item on the Agenda.

Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018; the Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill 2018, the Medicinal Products (Amendment) Bill 2018, and the Public Enterprise (Amendment) Bill 2018 will be debated and voted upon today. The debate will be limited to one hour for each Bill.

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his first motion.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE
EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2018**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker pursuant to resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018, I move:

That the Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill 2018 be debated, voted upon and passed today.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill was tabled in Parliament on 7th March, 2018, and seeks to amend the Employment Relations Act.

Madam Speaker, given that Fiji is a party to the the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it is imperative that our laws are compliant to our State Obligation under CEDAW. There is a particular provision at the moment, within the Employment Relations Bill that is discriminatory against women and I think essentially it stems from a stereotypical patriarchal image of women and their ability to do certain things. The particular provision says that females are prohibited from working underground in mines of all kinds, except in management positions not requiring manual work, in health and they offer their services in educational training or for occasional non-manual work.

Of course, as we know, Madam Speaker, women in Fiji have made enormous strides now, starting off from you, Madam Speaker. You are the first female Speaker of Parliament. We, of course, have a Secretary-General to Parliament that has been a female. We, of course, have a Secretary to Cabinet that is being female. We have never had a Speaker to Parliament who is a female but we have never also had the simultaneous three positions been held by women. It is the first time that we have the Speaker of Parliament, the Secretary-General to Parliament and Secretary to Cabinet all female at the same time.

Of course apart from that, Madam Speaker, in Government today, we have had for the first time, for example, a female from a recollection from our recent past, being the Director of Lands. For the first time, we have been having females being Registrar of Companies Office or of the Titles Office.

We have today a female Ambassador to Indonesia, which is one of the largest country in the world. We have a female Ambassador in Geneva. Apart from all these areas, we have had for the first time, a female Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Economy. All of these positions, Madam Speaker, were generally held to be jobs that could be held by the boys or men. But today, Madam Speaker, we have new laws that have revamped the old penal code. We now have the Crimes Act where it has removed, as mentioned the other day a few days ago, rules of collaboration, made gender neutral.

We now also, Madam Speaker, have the Domestic Violence Act and various other provisions and, indeed, practical changes that are taking place. We now have many female who sit on various Boards who have been appointed by Government. We have females who are Permanent Secretaries in Government, Madam Speaker. Of course, we have had some in the past but all these combined together goes to show that women play a formidable role in the governance of our country and also in the private sector.

So, Madam Speaker, it would be amiss of us to assume that females cannot actually work in mines underground, and it would be amiss of us as a country to send a message to the rest of the world that we also stereotype women. I know Honourable Members from the other side have some stereotypical images of women; some have, for example, in the past not agreed with the fact that women can do boxing; some have generally referred to the fact that washing of clothes and dishes are only women's job.

Madam Speaker, the reality, of course, is that we also need to be able to understand the dynamics, the gender differences and the power differentials in our society that exist between men and women. For example, DVROs, et cetera, that was talked about the other day. Of course, DVRO, Madam Speaker, cannot be 'sat down and done on a reconciliation' basis, but one of the party has a huge power differential.

Madam Speaker, as a country, we progressed tremendously in a very short period of time and particularly under the Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government. We believe that this is another milestone and I would urge all Honourable Members of Parliament to actually support this Bill.

This Bill, Madam Speaker, as from a practical perspective, is a very simple Bill. It has got only two Clauses and says:

1. Cited as Employment Relations (Amendment) Act;
2. Comes into force on the date appointed by the Minister; and
3. Employment Relations Act 2017 is amended by deleting section 88 which is the discriminatory provision.

I would like to urge all Honourable Members to support this Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is out for debate. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I rise to support the Bill. The Bill seeks to delete section 88 of the Employment Relations Act that allows mining employers from prohibiting females from working underground in the mines. I think this is a good initiative from the Government side, and the deletion of section 88, of course, will eliminate discrimination against females and confirmative with CEDAW. This will bring Fiji on par with many countries.

I agree with what has been said before with respect to the fact that women can do what men can do. Mining is generally regarded as muscular work and it puts women on the same pedestal as men and not portrayed as weak and vulnerable. However, Madam Speaker, we hope that there are strict guidelines and policies in place to prevent the exploitation of women in workplaces, particularly in mines as we have seen examples of that in many other countries where women are actually allowed to work in the mines.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I support the Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Labour?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I am just rising in support of the Bill. I think this is an indication, again, of how Government is looking to satisfy some of the provisions that we have in the Constitution for instance, where we have in section 32 the right to full and free participation in the economic life of the State and the right to choose your own work. I mean, that right that has been guaranteed in the Constitution and through constant tweaking of our legislations that were put together at the time when people had a different way of looking at the different genders, it is allowing us to continually make the change. The State is taking progressive steps towards achieving this particular part of the Constitution that we have.

I know also that Fiji had already ratified the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention of 1958 that upholds the fact that all people have the right to pursue both, their material well-being and their spiritual development on conditions of freedom and dignity and economic security and equal opportunity. So, this particular Convention that I am talking about, its principles are already embedded in the Employment Relations Act and the other enabling legislations administered by my Ministry. So, it is good that we are getting to this step and cleaning out other aspects of the existing

legislation that have prohibited women from participating in something that they might want to do in the future.

One of the challenges that we still have in Fiji while our unemployment has gone down, I mean, the earlier test that we had in the Unemployment Survey of 2010-2011 was that our unemployment was at 7.1 percent, then we had the Unemployment Survey of 2015-2016 or 2016-2017, but then we were going down to 5.5 percent and now in the Census, it is down to 4.5 percent. But one of the challenges that we have had over these past few years has been the participation rate of women in the labour force. There has always been a disparity, we have not been able to tap into the economic might and the productive capacity of a significant portion of the women whom we have in our population.

Our Bureau of Statistics show that 51.4 percent of the population is female, but when you look at the labour force participation rate, 76.4 percent is males and only 37.4 percent is females. So there is obviously a need for us to look at the structural impediments to female participation in the workforce and to get rid of this. Obviously this step that we have taken today is something along that line, something that is moving in that direction to free us of those impediments.

The other issue that I keep thinking about now is that, when your unemployment rate is down to 4.5 percent and as it begins to move lower, it also brings its own issues. There can then be competition for labour, and when that happens there is likelihood that as a result of supply in demand, as we are already seeing in the construction sector and other sectors, labour wage goes up and when it goes up, it can create labour inflation which can then be passed on to the cost of goods and services which can either inadvertently cause inflation in the economy as a whole. So, any attempt to bring in more women to fill up positions when they can be employed, is something that we should welcome. So my Ministry and I, fully support this Bill.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, this is Bill No. 1 of 2018 and the purpose is very well stated in paragraph 1.4 which says that the prohibition perpetuates gender stereotyping.

I agree totally with the Bill but I wish to make a comment that it is an embarrassment that the Government is bringing in this Bill now right at the evening of their time in Parliament. You are about to be voted out and they realised the need for this. And you looked back at all the Standing Committees. They have been talking about gender balance, gender balance, gender balance; what were you doing? What were you doing? So it is not a milestone, it is an embarrassment to Government to be bringing this Bill at this stage.

It is an embarrassment, what were you doing? What were you doing, sitting on your back? What were you doing?

All the time if you look at the Standing Committees, they have been saying 'gender balance, gender balance, gender balance' and it was their own Act of 2007 that you are now amending. In 2007, you introduced this Bill to prohibit women. 2006 you took over, 2007 this came into effect, and now you are saying it is a milestone. It is not a milestone, it is an embarrassment! Sitting down on your job doing nothing! That is the point I wish to make and I am very sad that this has come up now. I am not even sure, I think the women will not vote for you.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You were taking too long. Yes! 12 long years, you were doing nothing that is what the women will be saying.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Faiyaz Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, from the Honourable Member's last comments, I think we all know why he did that, he wants the women to vote for him.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Shame on you! Shame on you Honourable Member, do not look for votes now.

Madam Speaker, obviously much has been said by the Honourable Attorney-General and the other speakers with respect to the removal of section 88. It is timely, it is called for, obviously, Madam Speaker, and as the Minister responsible for the Mineral Resources Division, I would just like to inform this House as a matter of fact, apart from the list that the Honourable Minister for Economy has read out, the current Director of Mines also is a woman. We have a female Director, again, we have a female Director at Land Use, we have a female Director at Tourism, we have a female Director at Trade, and the list goes on.

Not only that, Madam Speaker, with respect to the Mineral Resources Division, there are quite a number of very successful, very smart and tough women who are very willing and able to do this job and it is timely that this has actually happened. Apart from the fact that we had rectified CEDAW, it is also something that has reinforces our particular commitment to it. And, Madam Speaker, our Constitution again with every Fijian equal right to economic participation and I wholeheartedly support this Bill.

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

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, we support the Bill. As the Act states that an employer is not prevented from prohibiting the employment of females in underground work mines, in mines of all kinds and the exception is there.

Underground mining in Fiji is only in Vatukoula and Tuvatu. It is very important for the relevant stakeholders to be able to play their part, especially in Vatukoula, it is an OHS issue. You go down 14 levels, the heat, the ventilation and those are the conditions that should be addressed to make it more attractive for women to be able to work underground.

The other mines are all on the surface. NJV will be an open cut mine. As for the underground mines, Vatukoula must be addressed to be able to allow women to go underground, as well as Tuvatu which has just recently opened.

The other issue is, for mining, there should be some certification for entry into the work mines, especially in Vatukoula now, there are labourers coming straight from the village into Vatukoula Mines and they are expected to produce in the mines which is very critical in terms of addressing OHS and to be able to have a safe environment to work, to be able to have certification to go into the mines as a minimum requirement when you go into the mining industry. That is my contribution, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity.

Madam Speaker, as we all know that today is the International Women's Day and aptly demonstrated by some of the Honourable Members here who are wearing purple, and I pass my best wishes to every woman in this country, who has helped contribute to the economy.

Now Madam Speaker, one of the traits of the FijiFirst Government has been that we do not only celebrate occasions, we do not only talk about celebrations, we actually go out and give gifts for those occasions. On International Women's Day what better gift then to open the mining industry and underground work to all the womenfolk of this country.

This law that has been in its archaic form has prevented women from working in underground mining industry. The Employments Relations Act itself used to read, that the employer is not prevented from prohibiting the employment of female in the underground work in mines of all kinds, except in management positions, not requiring manual work, in health and welfare services, in education or training or for occasional non-manual work. So it was effectively keeping almost 50 percent of the population of this country outside of manual labour in the mining industry.

That, Madam Speaker, has actually deprived the women of this country of the opportunity to be employed in your well-paid job. In my practice days, I have been a lawyer for the Vatukoula Gold Mines and I noticed that the underground mining work is a very well paid job. It comes with its risks, no doubt, but it is a well-paid job and it is a very labour oriented work which actually has a potential of making our women stronger. It is a very hard labour-oriented work and as Honourable Prem Singh said, it used to be a man's job and now, the Government has opened it up for everyone. Now, the womenfolk of this country are able to participate in a well-paid job in the mining underground industry and it is going to be good for the economy.

We have seen in other countries that women actually do labour oriented work at the mines. They drive forklifts, trucks and they actually use some of those drills and work in the shafts. Fiji was lagging behind in this area and the FijiFirst Government should be congratulated for opening up this industry to the women. There may be a lot of women who may not be employed in an area where they wished to be employed, they want to do rugged work that was reserved for men. Now, this, Madam Speaker, opens the door for them. They can enter into the mining industry to do underground work. People from Vatukoula and the West will be happy with this. I can see Honourable Gavoka smiling, probably he is going to campaign on this in Vatukoula.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, I was a bit baffled by the comments of the Honourable Nawaikula on what the Committee has been doing in respect of having gender equality. Now that is coming from the Member who has not attended a single Committee meeting for the past two years.

(Honourable Members interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Nawaikula is a member of my Committee, the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee and he has not attended .

(Honourable Members interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, its coming from a Member who is part of my Committee, a permanent Member of the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee, he has not attended any single meeting for the past two years, Honourable Leawere has been deputising for him and his making comments about the Committee's work. Madam Speaker, I think he should withdraw that comment because it actually undermines my Committee's work.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is a reflection of us over here.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Yes, it is a reflection on that side because you have not been coming to the meetings.

With that, Madam Speaker, I support this amendment of the Bill and once again congratulate the women of this country for this very good opportunity from all of us the FijiFirst Government. Thank you very much.

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

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to support the Bill. Let me make my short contribution to Bill No.1 of 2018. Madam Speaker, now more than ever there is a strong call to action to press forward and progress gender parity. There is a strong call to press for progress motivating and uniting friends, colleagues and whole communities to think, act and be gender inclusive.

Madam Speaker, the Employment Relation Amendment Bill 2018 seeks to remove Section 88 of the Employment Relation Act, 2007. Madam Speaker, females should be accorded the same employment right as males to work wherever they choose to work.

Madam Speaker, I would like to draw parallel to the Women Mining Coalition (WMC) of United States. The WMC is a group of women that comes together to provide the members of congress and other policy makers with facts about modern mining industry and showcase the professionalism of women who worked in the mining industry. The Women Mining Coalition's Mission (WMCM) is to deliver the message to the legislatures that a strong mining industry is vitally important to a nation, communities, families and livelihood of its people and it is very important to be supported. Madam Speaker, I fully support the Bill. *Vinaka*.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the Bill that is before the House. We agree that Section 88 of the Act was discriminatory and Fiji's domestic law needs to be aligned to international convention such as CEDAW.

Just a small contribution, we all agree with the idea that man and woman must have the same opportunity in the workplace. But there are few issues probably the relevant line Minister could take on board the other issue of this year FNU launched a programme called Certificate for Geology, Mining and Quarry for resource owners. The problem there is that this particular programme is not sponsored by TELS, if that could be allowed to give that opportunity for resource owners to have proper scholarship for this particular course which will enable them to meet the minimum requirements in working in this attractive industry. On the other hand if Government can consider allowing mining permits, if they could work with various applicants and stakeholders to allow at least some sort of sponsorship with the landowners in regards to attaining mining qualification.

Those are few things, Madam Speaker, that the Government can take on board in regards to empowering our people, how to gain qualification in this industry and also to gain access into employment in the mining and the quarrying industry in Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will now give the floor to the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to contribute to the Bill.

First of all, Madam Speaker, a very Happy International Women's Day to one and all, and also my sincere appreciation to those men who have been a pillar of strength to their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters.

Madam Speaker, today is an opportune time to speak on the subject as we celebrate the International Women's Day which was a result of women workers who started out on a protest to claim equal worker rights in 1908. Madam Speaker, the essence of this commemoration is not only the achievements of women but a reassurance of Government, Civil Societies, International Organisations and every individual to continue in their pledge for a better life for women.

Madam Speaker, consistent reviews and revision of legislations is mandatory and the amendments to Section 88 of the Employment Relation Act 2007 is a recognition of the fact that women have the right to choose their profession, and they have the right to be treated equally to her male counterparts in that regard.

Echoing similar sentiments as the Honourable Attorney-General, women today have broken barriers at various levels and entered fields that our patriarchal society deemed a man's job, Madam Speaker. Women today are limitless and it is not wise to not engage their participation in any sector of employment in the economy, as it is a sure shot of holding back on meeting our growth as a nation.

Madam Speaker, the discrimination in Section 88 is very obvious and it spells out women's right to equal opportunities in the mining sector is prejudice. We have seen, heard and read about achievements of women in all facets of life, be it sports, politics, music, flying, sail at sea, they created pathways in the skies and on the ground by overcoming barriers and beating the odds to reach their goals. I salute these women who struggled, had passion and inspired many, they are role models to many, Madam Speaker. Taking into consideration their capabilities, their strength and stamina women should be given the same employment rights and opportunities as males to work wherever they choose to. They should be treated as equal with men at workplace.

Madam Speaker, the rights, responsibilities and opportunities should not depend on whether they are born male or female. It should be merit based and that is exactly what our FijiFirst Government is trying to achieve through reforms. Madam Speaker, this amendment and is a positive step towards achieving equality as well as protective measures against discrimination and ultimately the empowerment of women.

Madam Speaker, I fully support the amendment to the Bill. Before I take my sit, I would like to say to every woman that you have the power to change, you have the will to be what you are, salute your courage in life and salute who you are. Honourable Nawaikula please let the women choose whom they want to vote for. They have actually chosen us in 2013 so let them decide this time as well. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Mohammed Dean you have the floor.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I felt responsible to make some comments in regards to this Bill because not only is it a milestone in nature, but considering the fact that we have International Women's Day today. A big *vinaka vakalevu* to all the women who play a very important part in our lives: our grandmothers, our mothers, our wives, our daughters. They are very influential and very strong people and without them any man would be deemed to be considered incomplete.

Madam Speaker, the beauty about this Bill is that it not only recognises the intellectual abilities of the women, it also recognises the physical abilities of the women by allowing them more opportunities to work in industries like gold mines. We know that such type of extractive industries there are work requirements which are physical in nature. On this note it is very encouraging that the Government of the day is making amendments to make more leeway for the women not only to be part of the intellectual, the management work in our nation but also to be part of more physical work as well.

There have been comments coming from the other side of the House saying that the Government has failed and now they are recognising this Bill. The Mining Industry has been there for almost 100 years, at least the FijiFirst Government recognised this and they are making these amendments, so it is never too late. It is very encouraging to note that this amendment has taken place and of course thanks to our FijiFirst Government that such amendments are there making more opportunities for women to be part of the workforce, especially in the extractive industry.

With these notes and comments, I fully support the Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Brig Lal.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I rise to give my short contribution to this Bill. First of all, I would like to wish every woman a Happy International Women's Day.

Madam Speaker, today women are employed in all sections of the economy. We have made tremendous progress towards gender equality. Education is the foundation for development. The Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals have greatly bridged the gap in education between boys and girls. This is where I salute the FijiFirst Government for the various initiatives introduced on education, making every girl complete her education to enable her to live longer and live a happy and a healthy life.

One of the UNESCO Reports point out three important things and which I would like to share:

- 1) For each extra year of schooling is associated with increased earning of up to 10 percent;
- 2) A child born to a mother who can read is estimated to be 50 percent more likely to live beyond the age of 5; and
- 3) Women with post-primary education are five times more likely to be knowledgeable about the HIV Aids than women who are illiterate.

Madam Speaker, women are actively represented in leadership positions both in the formal and informal sectors. They are active social workers, mothers, food gatherers, sports, politics, agriculture and industrial work, et cetera. I am extremely happy to see this amendment being brought in this Bill, and I fully support this Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. We have only eight minutes to close, we still have two speakers so for the last two speakers we are giving you four minutes. Honourable Naiqamu you have the floor.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill.

Today is International Women's Day. I am proud to say that my Ministry is doing all it can to ensure effective gender balance in the workforce. A large number of senior positions are being effectively held by women in my Ministry, Madam Speaker, to name a few, the Acting Permanent Secretary for Forests; the Conservator of Forests; the Director of Corporate Services; and the Divisional Forestry Officer, Western.

Madam Speaker, these women come from different backgrounds with rich work experience and play huge roles in terms of decision-making for the Forest sector in the country. These women leaders make up 46 percent of the current female workforce in the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, our female officers have been proactive in trainings conducted internally and externally; 52 percent females undertook a Sustainable Forest Management Training in 2017, out of which 50 percent were female graduates from the Forestry Training Centre. This is the level of commitment and progress in gender equality that this Government has initiated and continues to provide an enabling environment. The Ministry also supports women's groups in our communities through the re-forestation of degraded forest programmes. Saunitaqa Village is based in the district of Wailevu in the Northern Division, and women in the village have been collecting seeds from the forests for nurturing in their village nursery, with the money earned they were able to construct a bus-stop to shield the children from the hot sun or rain when waiting for the bus pick-up.

Madam Speaker, this is one of the many communities around the country that have women at the forefront in terms of conserving and sustaining the forest resources. We must continue to support the women of Fiji and embrace the important roles they play as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of our beloved nation.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I wish all women a Happy International Women's Day and thank them for their contributions, whether small or large, and the male champions who are advocating the support for the move towards a smarter and transformative Fiji, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to give my short contribution in support of the Bill before the House, particularly on International Women's Day. This is a milestone for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Fiji. With the removal of this particular section in the Employment Relations Act, it actually means that girls going to school now will start to see this as a possible avenue for work and livelihood in their lifetime.

It is very appropriate that this is being done today because of the theme of International Women's Day, also the time is now rural and urban activists are transforming women's lives. This Bill will do just that, transform women's lives particularly girls who are going to school at this time. But the need to be able to battle these challenges faced in relation to gender-inequality, we are doing our part today as Parliamentarians but it needs to be done across all sectors, and I particularly call on the media in relation to their role in carrying this forth.

I was part of a panel discussion this morning on the topic of “Stompings, Sexism in Workplaces”, and I read out a letter to the Editor which I would like to share with the House in a recent *Daily*, it reads:

“2018 Election

I would like to thank SODELPA and the National Federation Party for picking the prettiest and maybe the smartest ladies to contest the 2018 Elections. FijiFirst has also got two pretty ladies as Ministers and I hope they can get some more pretty ladies in their line-up. Let us make this Election like a Hibiscus festival.”

Madam Speaker that is the extent of what we are battling against. It needs attention across all sectors and as Parliamentarians, we are at a very special position here to do something about it, and I am glad at the behest of Government we are doing that today. But I hope that this will go beyond this House, that we will take it out there to all sectors and particularly call on the media to pay attention to these matters because I am sure if this was a racial slur it would not have been published because it is a crime. But because it deals with gender it becomes fair game from a media. I call on the media today to please pay attention to these matters and be very careful, be cautious, be mindful of the battle that this nation is carrying forward against gender inequality and the empowerment of women. *Vinaka*, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all the Members spoken in support of the Bill. It is rather entertaining Honourable Nawaikula about why have we not brought it earlier, you also have the opportunity to do so. You brought in other Bills like amendment to the Surfing Decree and Mahogany. If you had given priority to gender equality you had actually done that yourself. You actually have the right to be able to bring Bills which you did not, you chose not to, you chose not to. You had the right to bring in Bills too but you chose not to do so.

Madam Speaker, this is also very much in alignment with the Fijian Constitution. Just to remind members of the public and also the Honourable Members of this House in particular those on the other side that we have the Fijian Constitution under Section 26, the new provision even in comparison to 1997 Constitution, for example, you cannot discriminate against someone because of their pregnancy or because of their marital status, or because of their gender identity or indeed their disability. This is again in respect of the changes that are taking place.

Madam Speaker, I want to once again remind the Honourable Nawaikula in particular the fact about the domestic violence sections brought in by this Government, the Penal Code, the Family Law, we have also amended it to recognise de facto relationships. In fact next week we will be tabling another Bill that will actually look at de facto relationship recognition in the Succession Act that exists which currently does discriminate against women. As we know most de facto relationships in Fiji are women who are in de facto relationships and they are the ones who actually lose out when de facto relationships are not recognised, they are the ones that are actually left on the periphery when they have to look after the children when the husbands or the de facto partner who is generally the male actually takes off.

Once again I just wanted to say that it is rather a coincidence as I have mentioned it to the Minister for Women we did not plan this Bill to be tabled on this day and be debated on this day, but it just so happened that it is International Women's Day. Perhaps it is a coincidence that obviously means that this is something very positive that is happening and Honourable Nawaikula may be this is why it took so long because it needed to take place on International Women's Day, because you have not done it yourself.

Madam Speaker, once again I would like to thank all the Members who supported this and I am sure all the women in Fiji would also be very much supportive of this. I recommend this Bill to Parliament and we all support this unanimously. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote, the question is pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018 that the Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill, 2018 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion.

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition.

The Bill enact to amend the Employment Relations Act 2007 Bill No 1 of 2018 enacted by the Parliament of Republic of Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney General to move his second motion.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE MEDICINAL PRODUCTS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2018

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 7th March, 2018, I move that the Medicinal Products (Amendment) Bill be debated, be voted upon and be passed today.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I call the Honourable Attorney General to speak on the motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker, the Medicinal Products (Amendment) Bill, 2018 was tabled in Parliament as Bill No 2, 2018 on 7th March, 2018 and seeks to amend the Medicinal Products Act 2011.

By way of background, Madam Speaker, the Act itself aims to protect the health and safety of the public by regulating medicinal products, devices and poisons than other similar products.

Section 5 which is the subject matter of the Act establishes the Fiji Medicinal Products Board whose functions include:

- Granting authorisation or licenses for medicinal products, poisons and devices;
- Granting license for premises for medicinal products, poisons and devices stored;
- Formulating standards and preparing endorsed codes of practice in providing advice to the Minister.

There are numerous consultations with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in Fiji Pharmaceutical Biomedical Services Centre, the Board and the Office of the Solicitor General.

Madam Speaker, Section 10 of the Act deals with the procedures of the Board. These procedures have conflicting provisions which have caused some confusion in terms of the Board meetings. Firstly, Section 10(1) allows Board members to choose a member to preside at the meeting in the absence of the presiding member and the deputy presiding member.

However, Sections 10 (5) and 10 (6) states that the quorum at any Board Meeting must include the Chairperson or in his or her absence the Deputy Chairperson and four members, and the meeting must be cancelled if both the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are absent.

For that reason, Madam Speaker, the Board has recommended these conflicting provisions be corrected. Therefore, the Medicinal Products (Amendment) Bill seeks to amend Section 10 of the Act to allow Board meetings to proceed in such circumstances where both the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson are absent.

Clause 1 of the Bill, Madam Speaker, provides for the short title and of course the coming to date of the Bill itself. Clause 2 of the Bill seeks to amend Section 10 of the Act to correct the conflicting provision. Currently the Act stipulates that Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson if both absent from the Board meeting then the meeting must be cancelled.

The proposed amendment allows the Board meetings to be held even in the absence of the Chairperson and the Deputy Chair. In that event the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson are absent for the Board meeting, the members present may appoint a member to preside at that particular meeting. The proposed amendment further provides that the presiding member in the exercise of all the powers as the Chairperson for the purposes of such a Board meeting.

As we can see the Bill itself Madam Speaker, it is only two clauses and essentially it allows for the proceedings to take place, we have had many instances, sometimes both the Chair and the Deputy Chair are absent then the Board meeting do not take place. It is a very important Board and sometimes they could be for example travelling overseas so the meeting does not go ahead which leads to a lot of backlog in the work of the Council. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The motion is now open for debate, and I invite input if any. Honourable Alvick Maharaj?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I would like to give my small contribution towards this amendment. This is a very simple amendment but it has a very huge impact on the work carried out by the Board. As everyone knows Medicinal Product Board was established to ensure safe and effective medicinal products, device and poisons are imported into the country. The Board also looks at the effectiveness, safety profile, and its diverse facts of medication

In this changing globe new medications are developed on a daily basis and it is the Board's responsibility to ensure that medication imported into the country are of standard. For this reason, the Board needs to meet on regular basis but the confusion in the law was indirectly putting people at risk.

Madam Speaker, I was also a member of this Board and this Clause was causing hindrance in the work. Therefore, this amendment will ensure that the Board in the absence of Chair and Deputy continues to perform its duties as per the Act and thus, I support this amendment.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other input....

HON. M.D. BULITAVU. - Madam Speaker, probably there is still lack of background given by the Honourable Attorney General in regards to the requirement of this amendment. Given that this comes out of the Medical Product Decree in 2011 and now an Act and again it has taken them about nearly seven years to come with this amendment and given what the Honourable Member has said being a former member of that Board that they need to regularly meet.

The question we need to ask is why does the Government need to appoint a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman that are not available for meetings? It is very loose for the legislation to give powers to anyone, this could even create issues between Board members, the Deputy and the Chair not having knowledge of other things that could create future problems within the Board.

There has to be specific circumstances where the Honourable Attorney General has to tell this House what has currently happened on some issues that need to be urgently dealt with when the current Chairman, current Deputy Chairman was not available. Then again it comes down to the appointment of the Chairmanship and the Deputies, on how the Government selects people who have conviction in the country, in this particular industry. When to have the conviction to stay and also to have the time to deal with the various roles and responsibilities to deal with after being appointed in the Board. These are a few issues probably the Honourable Attorney-General must clarify before giving out this particular authority to the Board that will create more politics within the Board.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other input I now ask the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is a very simple amendment. The Honourable Member does know that any of the person that who actually fill in for the Chair or the Deputy Chair has to be a Board Member, they do not go and pick anyone from the street. Obviously this people are already familiar with what the Board does or what the Board proceedings are.

The reality is that this is actually trying to ensure that every time there is a Board meeting, in the event that someone is not available, only then can they appoint someone else in the place, it does happen. We do not have such restrictive provisions in other laws where, for example, we do have boards that actually have the ability to do so, to appoint other people to act as a Chair or the Deputy Chair in the event they are not present.

Madam Speaker, it is no hidden agenda, there is nothing Honourable Bulitavu. I think, he tends to have a lot of conspiratorial theories behind what he says. There is nothing conspiratorial about that, I am sure, in the same way, for example, that the Honourable Members who sit in the Committees, Honourable Niko Nawaikula, for example. They have attended all the Committee meetings but I am

sure there are other Honourable Members from his party that actually attended those Committee meetings so they are able to fill in for him, it is a similar thing. Please I am talking.

It similar as that and that is what this Amendment is seeking to do, Madam Speaker. We are trying to streamline processes. On the other hand when we try to streamline processes when you get this various boards to function quickly and address those issues, they complain about non-streamlined processes, and when we try to do that, they try to put clog works towards that. Madam Speaker, I gave a very simple motion where the Board can continue to function in the event, those two members are not present or one of them is not present. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote:

The Question is:

Pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament on the Wednesday 7th March, 2018, that the Medicinal Products (Amendment) Bill 2018 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the Motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- The Bill for an Act to amend the Medicinal Products Act 2011 (Act No.of 2018) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his third motion.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON
THE PUBLIC ENTERPRISES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2018**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament of 7th March, 2018 I move that the Public Enterprises (Amendment) Bill 2018 be debated, voted upon and be passed today. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do you have a seconder?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his Motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Public Enterprises (Amendment) Bill 2018 was tabled in Parliament as Bill No. 3 of 2018 on 7th of March consists of amendment Public Enterprise Act 1996.

Madam Speaker, the Act provides, for amongst other things, the regulation of the structure of Government commercial companies. Currently, Madam Speaker, Section 61 of the Act provides that the Government Commercial Company (GCC) must have only two shareholders whereas Section 14 of the Companies Act provides the company must have at least one shareholder.

Madam Speaker, what this Bill seeks to do, is to amend the Act to align the provision in the Act that relate to the number of shareholding in GCC to the Companies Act. This Parliament passed the Companies Act as we know, the old Companies Act existed in Fiji and had been amended dozens and dozens of time over the years in 1970 and that was completely repealed and we brought a new set of laws pertaining to companies in Fiji, the regulation of companies, the registration of companies which also included the number of shareholders that the company must have. To put it simply, Madam Speaker, what this Bill seeks to do is to recognise the change that has taken place in the Companies Act.

Previously, in order to form a company, you had to have at least two shareholders. Now with the Companies Act, you need to have at least one shareholder, so you cannot actually form a limited liability company with only one shareholder. So this Act is now being brought into compliance, or alignment we should say, with the new companies Act.

So previously, for example, if the Government owned company like AFL, Fiji Ports Corporation Limited or FBC or any other Government owned companies, they needed to have at least two shareholders and generally the shareholders that were put in were mostly the Permanent Secretaries. So you would have, for example, Permanent Secretary for Economy and Permanent Secretary for Public Enterprise who would hold the shares for Government; the two would be the shareholders. Because we no longer require under the Companies Act to have two shareholders, we will only have one shareholder, which is what this Act seeks to do, so one shareholder.

The second thing that this Bill does, Madam Speaker, is a question then arises, if you are going to have one shareholder for Government, who will that shareholder be? And because the Ministry of Economy looks after all the Government's assets, it is saying that the Permanent Secretary for Economy will be the shareholder for Government. Obviously, the shares are not held like in any State Owned Enterprises or Government Commercial Companies by the Ministers, but they are actually held by the Permanent Secretaries. So that is what this Bill seeks to do, Madam Speaker.

Clause 6, for example, amend Section 66 of the Act to provide that a shareholder in a GCC must, as far as practicable before exercising any right as a shareholder, consult with the Minister for Economy and act in accordance with any general or special direction given to the shareholder in writing

by the Minister for Economy. It needs to get direction for that because Government may have a policy to vote in a particular manner.

Government, for example, Madam Speaker, what this section does, it covers Government shareholding, for example, ATH. Amalgamated Telecom Holdings is owned predominately by the Fiji National Provident Fund but Government still has a stake in it. So, for example, when the shareholder that represents Government and those who at the Annual General Meeting the direction is given to the shareholder, whoever is going to represent Government at the Annual General Meeting, by the Minister for Economy.

The Permanent Secretary for Economy, Madam Speaker, will also hold the shares for Government in those equities also where Government does have minority shares also. So directions are essentially given by the Permanent Secretary for Economy including, of course, the Minister. But as far as the holding of the shares are concerned, it is held by the Permanent Secretary for Economy. This is what this Bill seeks to do, it is brought from 2 to 1 and then of course the shares held by the PS for Economy. The direction is given by the Minister responsible for Government. That is all, Madam Speaker, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Bill is open for debate and I invite for input, if any? There being none, the onus is on you Honourable Attorney-General if you want to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I think the vast introduction to the Bill speaks for itself.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote:

The Question is:

Pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament on Wednesday 7th March, 2018, that the Public Enterprise (Amendment) Bill 2018 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the Motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- The Bill for an Act to amend the Public Enterprise Act 1996 (Act No..... of 2018) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- For the information of the Honourable Members there are three motions from the respective Chairpersons of the Standing Committee:

1. Honourable Lorna Eden – Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs;
2. Honourable Netani Rika – Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence; and
3. Honourable Lt. Col. Joeli Cawaki – Chairman of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources

At the outset, I wish to clarify that the wording of the Motion allows the Parliament to debate the contents of the Reports. At the end of the debates, we will be voting merely to note the Reports. I remind Honourable Members that once the vote is taken on the Motion, it ends there and the Reports will not be debated again in Parliament.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to move her Motion.

DEBATE ON THE CONSOLIDATED REPORT FOR RESERVE BANK OF FIJI'S 2014/2015 ANNUAL REPORTS AND 2013/2014 INSURANCE ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, I move that Parliament debates the Consolidated Report on the Reserve Bank of Fiji's 2015, 2014 Annual Reports and 2014, 2013 Insurance Annual Reports which was tabled on 28th September 2016.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, following deliberations on the Consolidated Reports of the Reserve Bank of Fiji's 2015 and 2014 Annual Reports and the Reserve Bank of Fiji's Insurance Annual Reports of 2013 and 2014, I wish to advise the following, the Committee which is made up of the;

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| 1. Honourable Vijay Nath | - | Deputy Chairperson; |
| 2. Honourable Dr. Brij Lal | - | Committee Member; |
| 3. Honourable Viliame Gavoka | - | Committee Member; and |
| 4. Honourable Prem Singh | - | Committee Member; and myself |

We met with the Reserve Bank of Fiji Governor and his team with nine senior members. We heard evidence and held discussions with the team, and overall, our Standing Committee was pleased with the progress of the bank with regards to their Annual Reports and their Insurance Annual Reports. Upon conclusion of our scrutiny we had no recommendations or suggestions to make.

Madam Speaker, seeing as today is International Women's Day, I thought I would mention of the following observation made by our Committee with regards to gender;

1. We were happy to note that of the 10 member team that presented to our Committee, 5 were female and 5 were male.
2. The overall gender ratio of the bank between female and male in middle management, was at that time 48 percent and 52 percent respectively.

Madam Speaker, as the member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Motion is up for debate and I invite input if any? There being none.

HON. L. EDEN.- No further comments.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

The content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT OF MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION 2013

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence to move his motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I move that Parliament debates the Report on the Annual Review of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration 2013, which was tabled on 26th April 2016.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now I invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on Defence to speak on his motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, on behalf of the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion on the Review Report on the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration Annual Report 2013.

Madam Speaker, the Committee would like to acknowledge the tireless effort and hard work that has been rendered by the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration on the 2013 Annual Report. Upon scrutinising the Report, the Committee noted that the main area of concern was the management structure of the Ministry, which was not clearly stated in the Annual Report.

This was mainly for the Fiji Military Forces and the Fiji Police Force, specifically their function, responsibilities and finance. Therefore the Committee encourage that in future Annual

Reports of the Ministry, that the functions, responsibilities and finances of the two arms of national security are clearly identified.

Madam Speaker, given the number of years that have lapsed, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, hopes that the issues raised and the challenges faced in 2013 by the Ministry will be fully addressed. The timely response from the Ministry is greatly appreciated. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Motion is now up for debate and I invite input if any? Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Madam Speaker, if I may just comment on Page 9, recommendation 5 where it says that the Ministry responsible for RFMF is to look into the merits of expanding the training, capability and role of the RFMF engineer corps to enhance its rehabilitation work in times of environmental disasters.

Madam Speaker, this is a very important recommendation by the Committee, and I like in particular the expanding of the training of the engineering corps of the RFMF. I believe it is a part of the military, where a lot of our youth can be trained and especially in the field of engineering. If possible when they do train, they can be linked to qualifications at college level or even overseas. I say this Madam Speaker, because in my years as a hotelier in Shangri La, we have what we call our golden circle people, who are the cream of our guest list like. They can stay anywhere in Shangri La, and as soon as you are golden circle member, immediately things move for you. I mean it is kind of a recognition thing.

I remember talking to an electrical engineer who was working with General Electric, one of the biggest in the world in Beijing. I had a conversation with him, like being a Manager, I had an interest in him. I asked him, "how did you get your training", because General Electric is one of the best in the world, the biggest. He said that he was trained through the British Army. It always reminded me of how the military could train someone to become a senior member of General Electric, like I said, a global company.

This is why I have always looked at our military as a good training ground for our technical people and I like this particular one here, that it expand the training. I would like our men and women of the military, because they are a discipline force, the culture in there and the environment, you can really groom some people who can really take on some of the bigger roles that we are importing from aboard.

I like it and I think you will be hearing that our Party will be focusing on this, as we form the next Government, to train the engineers. Thank you Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh you have the floor.

HON. P. SINGH.- I thank the Committee for the Report. Madam Speaker, very briefly, this Report is reform focused for the Ministry Defence and as we see the seven recommendations that are in place. Some would require government policy change or it is up to the government how they deal with it. The first one states that there be three separate Ministries: the Fiji Military Forces, the Fiji

Police Force and the Department of Immigration. So these will require policy changes, it would be prudent at this stage, if I may highlight to this House, that if we had a response from the Ministry, then we would be in a better position to understand how long we could accommodate these recommendations. These recommendations had been done by the Committee after wide consultation and research.

The other point that I would like to make is that the Department of Immigration, has 19.1 million in its trust account. It is of course deposited with certain banks or financial institutions, it is only attracting 0.1 percent in interest and the recommendation is that we look at appropriate institutions to get better returns on our investments. Madam Speaker, I do not think it is a no brainer actually to look into this.

This is a very simple recommendation which can be taken on board. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to make a few comments. First of all I am sad that the staff from this Ministry are not here, so that they can hear this comments and take it on board. The first comment that I wish to make is that, one, it is not in the recommendation and I am told that this would be raised as a concern, the fact that the Ministry of Defence has not filed an annual account in these so many years. I feel it is important to do that, it allows transparency. There are things that we want to know, like regimental funds et cetera and that will only come about by a Ministry filing its annual account.

On the first recommendation, which says that they note gender equality, but there was no breakdown of gender equality within the ministry. I feel that there is a need for the Ministry of Defence to seriously look into taking in more females into the forces.

On the second recommendation, which says that the management structure of the Ministry that was presented does not include the RFMF and the Commander. Well that is a very bad reflection on any person you employ. That should be shown, and if they do not show it, you should sack them.

On the next recommendation, which says that the Committee noted the excessive cost involved in the maintenance of vehicles and the cost of fuel and oil. This is a very serious concern, not only for the Ministry of Defence and all ministries, abuse of vehicles.

The next recommendation that I wish to comment on says that unreconciled difference amounting to \$1 million between the FMIS ledger and the cash in the Immigration Department. That is a serious concern which the staff should take that into account and my last comment Madam Speaker, on the recommendation, there is an issue which is raised on the Department of Immigration that says, that there was an increase in the number of permits issued in 2014.

It is a concern which has been raised by the public, the lacklustre way in which permits are being issued. You should only issue permits to professionals for work that cannot be performed locally. In the last year and even currently, people are coming from China, Indonesia, Philippines and Pakistan to do work that can be done very well by the locals. Those are my comments that I wish to make in relation to this. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Just a few comments on the recommendations. I will base my comments on the budget. This is the 2013 Annual Report and on Monday, the Chairman for Foreign Affairs & Defence had also tabled the 2015 Annual Report.

The recommendations that were given in the 2013 Annual Report is repeated in other Annual Reports and time and again, when these Ministries come to present to the Committee, they bring the same challenges that they face especially on budgetary constraints and other issues like technology.

I think one of the issues that was raised there that if an increase budget will be given to the Fiji Navy in the advancement of the current vessels that they have. In November last year, the Navy ships that were seaworthy, petrol boats *RFNS Levuka*, *RFNS Lautoka*, *RFNS Kula* and *RFNS Kikau*.

In November last year, *RFNS Kikau* was undergoing a refit in Australia and was due to come back in February this year. *RFNS Kula* and *RFNS Levuka* were still undergoing refurbishment and other operational issues. Because, they are already 40 years old, if Government can consider buying new vessels for the Fiji Navy to be used in those operations in regards to certain rescue where timely response will be needed. If we do not have enough navy vessels around, it will be very difficult for the Navy to carry that out and also for monitoring our EEZ.

Those are a few things, Madam Speaker, and also the other thing that was raised in the Committee more recently by the Deputy Commander Navy, was the approval of funds by the Ministry of Defence in times of search and rescue, which is normally held by the Ministry. It takes time for them to do operations because they have to seek approval from the Ministry. If specific funds can be made available to the Fiji Navy for them to carry out search and rescue operations.

They can also gauge the stakeholders who might provide helicopters for them to engage on a particular search and rescue in a timely movement of operation. They are all waiting for approval which is more bureaucratic. In fact it could also be taken into account.

The other matter, Madam Speaker, since the start of this Parliament till to date, we still have not received any Annual Report from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. If the Republic of Fiji Military Forces could be encouraged to table an Annual Report that should be scrutinized by Parliament.

The Fiji Police Force, Fiji Correctional Services and the Ministry itself have submitted their reports and if the RFMF can be encouraged to provide an Annual Report for the Committee to provide scrutiny and make recommendations on how the organisation can be moved forward from where we are now.

Those are a few things Madam Speaker, just my contribution and comments on the budgetary allocation or the constraints that the Deputy Secretary have come to provide evidence for at the Committee level. They need an increase in terms of increasing their space, human resource and also other issues of manpower and advanced technology. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other input. Honourable Attorney General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I would like make a few comments. Just a clarification, when we are debating this report, we obviously not accepting the recommendation in the report, presumably. In that respect, therefore make some comments in respect of some of the recommendations. There is a recommendation on page nine, that the RFMF, Fiji Police Force and Immigration Department become three separate ministries.

We certainly do not agree with that, Madam Speaker. We believe that the current structure in the Ministry of Defence is sufficient enough and Of course, the Immigration Department is separate to the Ministry of Defence, it is no longer with the Ministry of Defence. Similarly, we already have a National Security Council that consists of various members and is chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, that we have the recommendation on Page 10, which again talks about the three separate Ministries and appropriate budgetary allocation being made. The point about the interest rate, of course, is something that the Ministry of Economy has been dealing with. Sometimes, as you know, some of these independent trust accounts, run by respective Ministries are done independently. We try to bring all that within the ambit of the Ministry of Economy.

The other point which seem to be a bit unclear on Page 13, the recommendation on top, we have got four of them: would the Solicitor-General clarify the ambit of the Security Industry Decree; whether the Government-funded security activities are exempted by the decree. I am not sure what they are trying to say over there.

Secondly, No. 3, we definitely do not agree with that, but the Ministry including the RFMF, Police and Immigration take advantage of the opportunities that are available to consult the Fiji Law Society on various decrees and legal instruments. Obviously, the Fiji Law Society is not the authority on this. Indeed the reputation of the Fiji Law Society, one may question at times, with the proclivities it does have as an organisation that can give a legal opinion.

Thirdly, of course, Madam Speaker, is that regarding the work permits. Again, there is obviously some work going on in that respect that Government has already started on, regarding that Madam Speaker.

The other point was on Page 14, the second recommendation, would the Ministry look into the merits of employing well-resourced lawyers within the Ministry. All the ministries now have separate lawyers that work for them and they come within the Solicitor-General's Office. They are able to develop the level of expertise but they all sit together to be able to feed off each other and to have the level of expertise we do not have as previously where each individual Ministry had its own lawyer.

Sometimes you get very junior lawyers working for respective ministries, they do not have the level of competence to be able to make legal decisions or give legal opinions and sometimes very complex areas of the law. So if they all fall under the Solicitor-General himself or herself then obviously that opinion gets scrutinised thoroughly before a legal opinion is indeed given.

So from that respect, Madam Speaker, there is also a number of other matters that are policy matters that go directly to a Government decision making agenda which is in conflict with what currently Government is doing. So on that basis, we would not necessarily agree with the recommendations but simply would note what the recommendations are without necessarily agreeing with the recommendations.

For example, here is a committee that is looking at the Ministry of National Security and Immigration and is now looking into economic areas. For example, the Ministry looking into leasing

arrangements for its fleet as an option even is economical. The vehicles are regularly maintained and in place. It has already happened. We already are leasing vehicles and most of the vehicles in Government fleet are doing this. For example, we have seen that the Police are already getting about 135 motor bikes. They are getting over 200 vehicles in the next lot. So all of these things are already happening.

So the recommendations in fact in a lot of the instances are no longer relevant to what is actually taking place on the ground. So we simply would just note as opposed to support the recommendations of this particular committee. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on Honourable Samuela Vunivalu to have the floor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to comment in regards to the Fiji Military Force. Some of the comments made by the Opposition that I wish to elaborate on that in the disciplined force, one of the main weapons is, we do not talk too much. We do not disclose, we do not copy, we do our own work and they do their own work. As mentioned by one of the Honourable Members that he was in Australia and how the military trained in Australia.

Madam Speaker, that is in Australia. We do have our training colleges in Fiji and we do send people to train abroad and teach us as engineers and other units in the military. I want to say again that for people who join the military, they are trained not to disclose things but work and keep things secretly in the military.

I want to make it clear to the Opposition Members that there are nine ex-military personnel in the Government side and there are a few in the Opposition. They should know better what the military is all about. This is an organisation that is different from other organisations. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just two comments I noted coming from Honourable Nawaikula. First of all he mentioned that the accounts of the Ministry of Defence had not been scrutinised.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- No, no! He was reading extracts from the 2015 Audit Report. He can ask Honourable Aseri Radrodoro because we have already scrutinised the accounts of the Ministry of Defence, so that comment from him is totally incorrect.

The other comment was on gender analysis. Now this is what happens when you do not come to Committee meetings and you do not know what is happening. Gender analysis was only made mandatory after March last year as per the directive of the Honourable Speaker that all the Committee reports and all Government departments appearing for interviews give a gender analysis breakdown. So this is a 2015 report, possibly at that time gender analysis was not mandatory which is why ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- ... the gender breakdown is not there and post your directive that gender analysis should be included in the Committee's report of 2017. When those reports will be tabled, gender analysis will there. Thank you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Gender analysis was there from the beginning, 2009 and that is correction.

HON. MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He is wrong. Clarification. So correction.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now that does not qualify as a Point of Order. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak in reply.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, some issues raised by the other side of the House is not part of the report and is invalid information to this report as well. There is a lot of negativity. I would like to remind Members of this House, speak negative, negative follows you. So it is time to be positive.

After 60 days of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence tabling the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration Annual Report 2013 in Parliament, the Ministry of Defence have responded accordingly to the five recommendations made by the Committee. However, recommendation two was highlighted by the Ministry as unrealistic and not logical to sustain.

The response from the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration was that the Ministry is of the view that with Fiji's current population at 869,458 as at 2015, its GDP per capita 7,410 and its capacity and trade volume is within the classification of small island states. Accordingly to maintain the budget capacity for the proposed two separate ministries would be voluminous and not logical to sustain.

So, Madam Speaker, the response from the Ministry was correct and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence has acknowledged it as reasonable and in the process, the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration had also amended their structure to include the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and the Fiji Police Force. The issue now is correctly back in place.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I convey our kindest appreciation to the Ministry of Defence for their timely response and

the amending of the Ministry's structure to include the RFMF and the Fiji Police Force, this gesture is greatly acknowledged. Madam Speaker, with those few comments, I thank you for this opportunity

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Noes")

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to move the motion.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008/2009

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, I move that Parliament debates the Report on the Ministry of Agriculture Annual Report for 2008/2009 which was tabled on 9th February, 2017.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson for the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak on his motion.

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Natural Resources Standing Committee I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the view that was made to the Ministry of Agriculture 2008/2009 Annual Reports.

Firstly, I thank the Honourable Committee Members for their efforts in producing and endorsing a bi-partisan report. Secondly I wish to thank the senior officials from the Ministry of Agriculture for briefing the Committee on the Ministry's achievements and performance in 2008/2009.

Madam Speaker, the Committee noted that the 2008 and 2009 the Ministry achieved three of the eight Millennium Development Goals which were poverty alleviation, food security for all and having sustainable natural resources. The achievement of the Ministry was an indication of its alignment to the relevant outcomes identified in the road map for democracy and sustainable socio-economic development, the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, the Green Growth Framework for Fiji including the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda.

Madam Speaker, the Committee commended on the Ministry's performance in 2008 and 2009 however believed that the performance of the Ministry could be further improved. The Committee then had anticipated that the issues and challenges faced by the Ministry in 2008 and 2009 have been considered and addressed through appropriately.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has reported back to the Committee that they have taken on board all the issues raised and are addressing all the issues as highlighted in the report.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments as a Member moving the motion I thank you for this opportunity. *Vinaka.*

HON. SPEAKER. - Thank you. The motion is up for debate and I invite input, if any. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I would like to make a few comments in relation to the report. I find this report a very good one. It is objective, it is analytical as well and it shows that Ministers can come here and make a song and dance about their ministry but the real picture out there is different and that comes out in the report and the findings of the report

HON. MEMBER.- Where?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will tell you.

They made about five findings:

1. The first one is that there is a systematic failure within the Ministry to provide a satisfactory level of financial accountability.
2. The accounting and financial reporting culture within the Ministry is extremely poor, very poor and there is a need for accurate and up-to-date financial management reporting so this is all very bad. It does not reflect well on the performance of your Ministry, or any Ministry. We are talking about 2008 and 2009 and there may have been some improvements but let us look at this Ministry here at that time.
3. Amongst the challenges in the Agricultural Sector is the need to develop a coherent set of policies designed to meet national objectives capable of being delivered.

HON. MEMBER.- Where is it in the report?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Page 11.

4. On reform and refocus – there is a very strong need to reform the Ministry and should be done within the assistance of independent external experts. Part of the focus for reform should be a thorough review of the Colonial era legislative framework governing operations within the Ministry. So here you have a Ministry that is here now but operating on the procedures of the colony.
5. Committee findings- lack of gender inclusiveness policy in place and to remind the Honourable Member this is 2008 and 2009. Gender did not start in 2015.
6. Recurrence of non-accountability of funds – this is repeated year after year.

And then we look at the reply from the Ministry, what did they say? In relation to lack of gender inclusiveness policy, this is what they are saying.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, in a Committee there are the Opposition and the Government Members. What Honourable Nawaikula is doing, he is trying to disgrace some of the Committee from his own party, like the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki and Honourable Dulakiverata. We work together.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- What is the Point of order?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- My point of order is that he should think about them too.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, maybe the Honourable Member should listen and help his colleagues that side do a better work.

HON. SPEAKER.- Excuse me, please can I have the floor? I have to make a ruling on the point of order.

I am unable to make a ruling on that point of order because there is no point of order. Honourable Nawaikula you may continue.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Lack of gender inclusiveness policy, their excuse was that in 2015 they started to work on a policy and they did not say whether they have implemented it or not. That is the reply from the Ministry for 2008 and 2009 and even so for 2011 and 2012; same answer. Madam Speaker, 2015 with no uncertainty of whether it has been implemented or not. In relation to the concern on the recurrence, recurring of non-accountability of funds, this is the Ministry's answer for the 2008/2009 period. "It was due to reconciliation not done properly during this period, there was a lack of skilled staff"

Then 2011/2012 same answer; still lack of skilled staff and it goes on and on. The point I wish to make, Madam Speaker, is that we come here and this is the real situation that is happening in a ministry, and in all those ministries, whether it be this ministry or any other ministry, they are the same and there really needs to be a closer look at the way that they are doing their work, their performance and their output. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Committee on Natural Resources for a very detailed report. Madam Speaker, I believe that this report is in respect of 2008/2009 and since then we have a very hardworking Minister who is on top of things, I believe. What this report does, Madam Speaker, is, it makes observations, findings and some of the findings that I see has led to a platform from where the reform and the focus should be. May I quote "as a bare minimum it is necessary for Parliament through Cabinet and the Minister to set out Government policy directives to be followed by the Ministry".

It further says, Madam Speaker, which is very important, "it is not for the Ministry to do as it chooses and then to report later. The performance and reporting parameters for the Ministry must be made to fit the national directive given to the Ministry and not the other way around". So I hope we have addressed this issue with the reforms that are coming in.

Madam Speaker, the other thing that I would like to highlight is on page 11 (5.21) - building the capacity of Ministry's staff to deliver approved services. Madam Speaker, this has been the bane within the Ministry for a very long time. There was a paper written sometime back on the failed agriculture policies of Fiji. This was one of the reasons where we did not have the capacity within the Ministry of all the staff in different fields.

Madam Speaker, unless and until you have capable staff, skilled, trained, you will not be able to deliver. We have always failed because of our implementation. The policies are there, the initiatives are there, the reports are there, the consultants have done their work, it is how we implement, and implementation requires a lot of skills.

Madam Speaker, the other one is the process of refocus and reforms. I believe as I said earlier, this sets out the platform from where we can move a step up to reform the Ministry and I know a lot of work has been done in the last couple of years, but the implementation, monitoring and performance remain a challenge for the Ministry because we can see all around Fiji, we have lot of initiatives in place. We have cattle farming, goat farming and livestock farming all over the place, but how consistent are we with these policies and how do they contribute to the national economy and our livelihood Madam Speaker. These are a few comments that I would like to make at this stage and would love to hear from the Minister how far he has progressed from this report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Very briefly....

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- (Inaudible)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Madam Speaker. On page 5 of the report, the Permanent Secretary gives an outline on the milk production in Fiji and he highlights the shortfall and the issues around all that. Yesterday, my colleague here was told that he cannot milk dead cows.

I just want to highlight here, Madam Speaker, the concern by the farmers in the manner their cows become dead or culled. In the Committee we scrutinized the report on the Fiji Meat Industry Board and we did speak with quite a number of dairy farmers and they were expressing some very serious concerns with the manner the Department was culling their cows which were suspected to be "infected". These are huge decisions to just decide to do away with 50 heads or 100 heads and the way they presented it to us was almost arbitrary, like it was just one test and on suspicion they put a cow down and later in the hearing, other farmers came up with better ways of testing; there is first grade and second and third.

It appeared that our people were going on the first one, any suspicion, they put the cow down. From this report, I would urge the Ministry to take note of this and make sure that you follow due process stringently and go the extra mile before you decide to put a cow down because it is such part of a farmer's livelihood.

That is what I would ask the Ministry to consider and implement going forward to help with the milk production and also ensure the livelihood of our farmers is not destroyed in a manner that I considered very arbitrary. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I am just here to assure the Honourable House that the Ministry of Agriculture is doing its best to address all the issues highlighted here in the 2008 report. The Permanent Secretary is seated in the gallery, Madam Speaker.

Section 127 (3) of the Constitution says that the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry is responsible to the Minister concerned for the effective, efficient and economic management of the Ministry or any Department under the Ministry should.

The Permanent Secretary is here to listen to the Honourable Members and of course, as I have stated, we have taken necessary steps to improve the Ministry. This is 2008 report, Madam Speaker. Most of these issues has been passed on from generations and it has been inherited.

If you refer to 5.11 of the report, Madam Speaker, Trust Fund Account, Trade Manufacturing Account (TMA) cannot be properly reconciled or audited. Going back to five even to 10 years, five years back from 2008 takes us back to 2003. Another five years back, so it all started from those days Madam Speaker, let alone the agriculture scam that came about.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, as I have stated, we have taken the necessary steps. In terms of the gender issues, we have worked in the last two years on our data together with FAO and of course with the specialists now in the Ministry, we are looking at all the relevant desegregated data, so statistics will be addressed.

Madam Speaker, Government is an equal employment opportunity provider and therefore does not discriminate our women and of course, a good majority of our women are in the Agriculture Ministry as well and that includes the Honourable Nawaikula's wife who has also retired. She was one of the senior staff of the Ministry before she left.

Madam Speaker, on the audit reports, we have made progress. We have five qualification issues and that has been reduced to two and that is the focus now for the management and hopefully by 2017 – 2018 we will get rid of all the qualification issues raised by the audit and so we are making progress. However, if you look at the report, these are processes and procedural issues, but if you look at the performance, the achievements of the Ministry, agriculture has improved significantly.

Madam Speaker, on the issues of "brucellosis," farmers who were complaining about the testing done by Agriculture have now regretted that they did not accept the results that were given to them by the Ministry. I can quote the farmers, Madam Speaker and I will give a Ministerial Statement next week on B-Tech. Now the farmers are regretting that they did not take the advice given by the Ministry of Agriculture and that has even resulted in more animals being slaughtered because they did

not accept in the first instant. It is about short-term diseases. They were not looking at the overall benefit that the B-Tech programme brings to the sector and of course to the industry.

Madam Speaker, I will give a presentation on that on Monday.

Let me assure this Honourable House again, Madam Speaker, as Minister responsible, we are doing our best to improve the Ministry. It is about capacity not only in the Ministry of Agriculture, it is consistent in most Government Ministries. We need to invest a lot in our people and of course overtime, we will incrementally make the improvements and of course ensure that the issues that are raised herein are addressed and most importantly bring back professionalism and efficiency into the way we do business, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak in reply.

HON. CDR. J. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, as I already said, the Ministry has reported back to the Committee and the Committee is working closely with the Ministry in terms of the issues that has been raised in the report. So on that note, I have no further comments.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Thank you very much Honourable Members. Before we adjourn, I just want to thank you very much for your patience in seeing today’s Order Paper through. We completed all the items in the Order Paper and I thank you for a very comprehensive input on that.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.21 p.m.