

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 17TH MAY, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 17TH MAY, 2018

The Parliament resumed at 9.35 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Lands and Mineral Resources; the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture; the Honourable B. Singh; and the Honourable A.T. Vadei.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 16th May, 2018 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to 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, internet and listening to the radio. I hope that you will enjoy today's proceedings, as well as learn about the Parliamentary practices and procedures.

Response from MITT LMR to Committee's Report

For the information of Honourable Members, the Secretariat has received the response from the Ministry of Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources with respect to the tabled Committee Report on the Consumer Council 2015 Annual Report.

JLHR - Deferment of Tabling of Report- Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

Honourable Members will note that the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights had further requested for his Standing Committee to provide its Report on the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill (Bill No. 6 of 2018) at a later sitting of Parliament.

The Business Committee, in its meeting last Friday, unanimously agreed to the request, taking into consideration the fact that the Standing Committee needs to undertake further public consultations on issues pertaining to the Bill. Honourable Members, I have therefore resolved that the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights will table its report at a later sitting date after which the Bill will be debated, and voted upon.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the presence of Ms. Siteri Nai Gonelevu who continues to be here every day, and we really thank you for your interest in Parliament. I really would like to give you a special welcome this morning.

(Acclamation)

Thank you, Honourable Members.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence - Review of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present this Report of the Fiji Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (SCFAD), on the review of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

This Report contains the Committee's recommendation and views on the Treaty. It also provides a summary and examination of written submissions and oral evidence received during the Committee's meetings from 27th April to 10th May, 2018.

The ICESCR was adopted on 16th December, 1966 by the UN General Assembly and entered into force 10 years later. The ICESCR, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the ICCPR, constitute the International Bill of Human Rights.

The ICESCR defines broad sets of rights related to the economic, social, and cultural elements of life that States must provide to their citizens. The specific rights relate to housing, education, labour, environment, health, cultural rights (including language and religion), and self-determination. It also covers the right to take part in cultural life and the right to enjoy benefits from science and inventions.

Madam Speaker, the Committee received many well-written and thoughtful submissions from a diverse range of views; Government ministries, political parties, CSOs, NGOs, academia, United Nations' bodies and other regional and international agencies. It is worth noting that during the Committee's review, a record of 34 women prominently participated in the submissions and consultations.

Madam Speaker, importantly addressing human rights through the Bill of Rights in the Fiji Constitution for all Fijians is critical to implementing the needs of national sustainable development in light of the challenges posed by climate change. The Committee notes the Fijian Government's goal of ratifying all human rights treaties and conventions by 2024 as noted in the five-year and 20-year National Development Plans

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, I sincerely thank all those who came forward to make submissions and air their views on this important Treaty.

On behalf of the Standing Committee, 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. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -
Review of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present this Report of the Fiji Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (SCFAD), on the review of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

This Report contains the Committee's recommendation and views on the Treaty. It also provides a summary and explanation of written submissions and oral evidence received during the Committee's meetings from 27th April to 10th May, 2018.

The ICCPR sets out civil and political rights which include, among others, the right to life; freedom from torture; freedom from slavery; right to be treated with humanity in detention; freedom of movement; right to a fair trial; right to be recognized before the law; right to privacy; freedom of religion; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of association and assembly. The ICCPR also provides for the rights of the child to registration and nationality and the right to participate in public affairs.

Madam Speaker, the benefits of Fiji ratifying the ICCPR:

1. It will complement and strengthen Fiji's constitutional provision under the Bill of Rights;
2. With 170 States having become a party to the Convention, ratifying the Treaty will raise Fiji's international standing in the Human Rights Council Community; and
3. It will promote cooperation and strengthen international relations with other State parties who have acceded to or ratified the Convention.

Madam Speaker, the Committee received many good submissions from a diverse range of views; Government ministries, political parties, CSOs, NGOs, academia, United Nations' bodies and other regional and international agencies. It is worth noting once again, the Committee received a record of thirty-four (34) women who prominently participated in the submissions and consultations.

Madam Speaker, the Committee sincerely thanks all those who came forward to make submission and air their views on this important Treaty. On behalf of the Standing Committee, 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. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to present the Committee's Report.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

Office of the Auditor-General's Annual Report 2015

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present to Parliament the Office of the Auditor-General's A Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications.

HON. SPEAKER.- Can you, please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General?

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Office of the Auditor-General's Annual Report 2015 to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Public Accounts Committee Follow-Up Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Audit Report of Government Ministries and Departments - December 2014

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise this morning to present the Report of the Public Accounts Committee to this Honourable House.

This Report follows the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Audit Report of Government Ministries and Departments - December 2014. This is my fourth Report as the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I welcome the opportunity to showcase the progress that Ministries and Departments in Fiji continue to make. Even the issues identified in these reports have either been resolved or are in the process of being addressed.

While the instances of the mentioned issues have reduced, there are issues that still need to be addressed as shown in the recommendations and the Committee's observations.

The Report identified audit issues within 38 Ministries and Departments for 2014. Of these, 20 Ministries and Departments were provided with an unqualified audit report with attention drawn in some instances.

A total of 18 Ministries and Departments were provided with a qualified audit report. The qualified audit report emanated from issues ranging from unsubstantiated and unreconciled general

ledger account variances, accounting irregularities in account balances, non-disclosure of account balances, board of surveys either not carried out or carried out but the losses were not approved or not recorded as losses to government and stock-take were not carried out.

Furthermore, the Committee's review of the Audit Reports highlighted that capacity is an inherent issue with accounting officers lacking the basic fundamentals required for reconciling and maintaining accounts.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, I would like to mention that the Government's merit-based appointments have, to a large extent, been successful in identifying the right people for the right place and for the right job. We have just seen some improvements in those Departments.

This Report contains a total of eight recommendations and observations made by the Committee. These recommendations have been made in good faith and we urge the relevant party for which the recommendations were made to consider and respond accordingly.

Some of the pertinent recommendations made are as follows:

- The Ministry of Economy should increase staffing and resources in their Internal Audit Division in order to be able to conduct quarterly or bi-annual internal audit inspections to all Ministries and Departments;
- The Ministry of Economy should conduct regular and timely training of Financial Officers on FMIS and ensure that the system is compatible with the actual operations of the Ministries and Departments;
- Ministries and Departments should ensure that daily reconciliations are conducted and also strengthen their internal controls in terms of separation of duties and conducting supervisory checks;
- Ministries and Departments should ensure that procurement of technical equipment, such as generators, pharmaceuticals, vessels, mechanical equipment, non-sugar access roads, for example, are carried out by competent personnel, particularly where procurements are made from abroad;
- Finally, Ministries and Departments should promptly take action on valid recommendations made by the Office of the Auditor-General.

On this note, Madam Speaker, there is a positive change that the Committee had noticed. The recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee have been adopted positively by the Ministries and Departments and they have made changes within which have resulted in positive outcomes.

At this juncture, I wish to thank fellow Committee Members for their efforts in clearing this backlog. The Committee Members of the Public Accounts Committee are:

- Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Mohammed Dean;
- Honourable Alexander O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health;
- Honourable Aseri Radrodri; and
- Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge the immense contribution provided by the late Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo during his tenure as a Member of the Standing Committee until his passing away.

I, on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee, commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- 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. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

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.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we move on to the next Item on the Agenda, we have here with us students and teachers from Nasauvere Primary School in Naitasiri. I wish to welcome each and every one of you to your Parliament.

(Acclamation)

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts -
Follow-Up Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji -
Audit Report of Government Ministries and Departments - December 2015

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you. Madam Speaker, this Report follows the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Audit Report of Government Ministries and Departments - December 2015. This is my fifth Report as the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I welcome the opportunity to showcase the progress that Ministries and Departments in Fiji continue to make. Even the issues identified in these Reports have either been resolved or are in the process of being addressed.

While instances of the mentioned issues have reduced, there are issues that still need to be addressed as shown in the recommendations and Committee observations.

The Report identified audit issues within 37 Ministries and Departments for the year ended December 2015. The audit of the Whole of Government concludes with an unqualified audit report. Of these, unqualified audit reports were issued to 20 Ministries and Departments while 17 were issued qualified audit reports on the following grounds:

- Variances were noted between reconciliations prepared by the Ministries and Departments and the FMIS Ledger maintained by the Ministry for Economy.
- Board of Survey was not carried out.
- Financial transactions were not recorded in the FMIS Ledger.
- Amounts reflected in Trust and Trading Manufacturing Accounts were not fully supported.
- Funds in approved budget estimates for 2015 were used for trust account expenditure.
- Independent stocktake was not done; and
- Ministries and Departments concentrated spending of their budgets towards the end of 2015 (December), hence indicating the lack of proper financial planning during the year. This contributed to significant un-presented cheques at the end of the year, placing undue stress on Government cashflows at the beginning of 2016.

The Committee notes that the root-cause of the issues highlighted in Volumes 1 to 4 of the 2015 Audit Reports were attributed to the quality of human resources employed in the Ministries and Departments which needs to be improved immediately.

I might mention at this stage, Madam Speaker, that the Government's plan as I mentioned earlier of merit-based appointments have to a large extent resolved this problem where the right people for the right jobs are placed in the right place.

This Report contains a total of eight recommendations and observations made by the Committee. These recommendations have been made in good faith, and we urge the relevant party for which the recommendations were made to consider and respond accordingly.

It is imperative that Heads of Ministries and Departments carry out detailed analysis of the audit reports and take proactive action to address people issues either through capacity-building or disciplinary process for non-performance or non-adherence to established policies and procedures.

In respect of processes, more concerted efforts need to be taken to streamline processes, enabling quicker completion of capital projects so that intended benefits are realised as soon as possible. Greater use of information technology systems will eliminate manual inventory control which is susceptible to errors, omissions and fraud.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to mention that the Ministries and Departments have taken the comments and the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee positively and they have made changes within, even before coming to the Public Accounts Committee. Some Ministries have actually resulted in positive differences.

At this juncture, I would like to thank fellow Committee Members for their efforts in clearing this backlog. Madam Speaker, I note that when I inherited this Committee, there was numerous, many months of backlog that was pending and we sat through late hours to finish this backlog.

I would like to thank the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Honourable Mohammed Abe Dean; Assistant Minister for Health, Honourable Alexander O'Connor; the Honourable Aseri Radrodro and the Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu for their assistance.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge the immense contribution provided by the late Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo during his tenure as a Member of the Standing Committee.

I, on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee commend this Report to the Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A Motion without Notice that a debate on the contents of the Report be initiated at a future sitting date.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts -
Audit Report of Seven Municipal Councils - December 2014

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I rise to present the 6th Report of the Public Accounts Committee. This Report follows the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji, Audit Report on Municipal Councils, December 2014. This is my 6th Report as the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Report identified audit issues within the seven Town Councils within the audit year of 2009 to 2013. Due to the timeframes involved, most issues have been resolved.

Two serious outstanding issues involving the Savusavu Town Council and the Ba Town Council have been identified and have been referred to the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) for further investigation, as per the practice in the past where the Public Accounts Committee acts with FICAC in terms of the pending issues that need further attention.

Letters of Referral are attached in Appendix 1 of this Report. All responses received from the Councils in 2017 have been attached in Appendix 2, showing many of the issues raised during the audit process that could have been addressed at that time, rather than being reported on for a further five to eight years. Both, the Office of the Auditor-General and the relevant Councils can reflect on this for the future.

What was clearly evident throughout this inquiry was the challenge for Councils to modernise their accounting systems on limited resources. Transitioning to international accounting standards, and transitioning all road assets to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) were both major issues throughout the audit period. In correspondence received in 2017 and 2018, both these major challenges now look complete.

The Public Accounts Committee had made one recommendation. In its previous work, the Public Accounts Committee has noted the general improvements occurring across the Whole of Government public sector accounting, involving Ministries and agencies. In Fiji, Councils have not been included in this process and do not have access to, or reporting requirements from FMIS and the Ministry of Economy.

The standards, however, should be the same. It is still “other people’s money” that is being handled by the Councils and the standards of accounting and reporting need to improve. This is more important (not less important) when resources are limited. No money can go unaccounted for on a limited budget.

The Public Accounts Committee is of the view that a major reason for public sector financial management improvement across the Whole of Government is due to the leadership role taken by central agencies in strengthening human capacity alongside the new FMIS technology. It is the human capacity improvement that is more important than technology improvement in improving public sector accounting. This has taken a lot of combined work across all agencies.

Councils and the central Department of Local Government can learn from the Whole of Government process currently underway over the past five years. Leadership is required from the Department in developing consistency in reporting and capacity building within each Council. The central Ministry of Economy can also provide full support to the Department of Local Government, to ensure this occurs.

In order to drive this reform process, the Public Accounts Committee has agreed to host a two-day roundtable with the Ministry of Finance, Department of Local Government, Office of the Auditor-General and key Council finance representatives, in order to ensure that a process is in place for the future that develops consistency of reporting and auditing, alongside capacity building of key staff.

I would like to thank all those who were involved in the hearings and submissions for this inquiry, including all Council representatives and the Office of the Auditor-General. As always, I would like to thank the Members of the Public Accounts Committee and the Committee Secretariat staff.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- 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. M.M. A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

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 agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we also have parents of the students from Nasauvere Village who have just entered and I would like to welcome them to Parliament this morning.

I now call on the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs - Airports Fiji Limited 2016 Annual Report

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Committee, I present the Report on the assessment made to the Airports Fiji Limited (AFL) 2016 Annual Report.

It was pleasing to note that the Nadi International Airport has become the first airport in the South Pacific to receive Level 1 Airport Carbon Accreditation by the Airports Council International

(ACI) and International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). This achievement has put Nadi International Airport on the global map, and we must commend the immense efforts, commitment and hard work by the team AFL. AFL, in 2016 also achieved the Skytrax Sixth Most Improved Airport in the world, Madam Speaker.

It was again pleasing to note that in 2016, one of the proudest achievements of Airports Fiji Limited was the completion of Nadi Airport Terminal Modernisation Project (NATMP) which is the iconic airport in the South Pacific right now. The strategies and approach taken by the Board to manage the cost and qualitative outcomes of NATMP and the ongoing monitoring of it to close the project at \$132 million was a success.

Once again this achievement calls for commendation. As per Executive Chairman's Report, it would have been easy to spend \$220 million on the project, if it was not managed well. It was noted that the enterprise business value of AFL over the last three years has also grown significantly.

In 2016, AFL recorded an operating profit before tax of \$65.86 million, compared to \$46.04 million in 2015; an increase of \$19.82 million or 43 percent. The total shareholder's fund grew to \$202.65 million in 2016, compared to \$183.2 million in 2015; an increase of \$19.5 million despite declaring \$30 million dividend.

During the same year, it contributed \$909,126 as it further support the Fijian people through the Prime Minister's National Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Fund and waived all fees and charges to aircrafts bringing in relief supplies to Fiji.

One of the biggest challenges for AFL was the widespread devastation caused by *TC Winston* that also destroyed Koro and Vanuabalavu Terminals. However, AFL was able to rebuild and refurbish both the terminals towards the end of 2016.

It was extremely pleasing to note that in their presentation, AFL attributed its success to its people as well, and I quote:

“Our people are an integral part of our success. One of the two pillars of Fiji Airports' overall strategy is our people, and the other is our management systems. One of our philosophies is teamwork and delivery through effective communication and understanding of roles.”

We once again congratulate the team of committed and motivated individuals who work together better than ever to bring AFL to new heights. We have no doubt that this great success will continue in the future, together with great dividends for its shareholders.

I thank especially the Chairperson of the Committee, Honourable Viam Pillay; Honourable Members - the Honourable Salote Radrodro, Honourable Ruveni Nadalo, Honourable Anare T. Vadei and Alternate Member, the Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou; as well as the Secretariat for their contribution towards the scrutiny and formulation of this bipartisan Report.

With those words, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social 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. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- 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. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

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 agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs - Fiji National University 2016 Annual Report

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to present the Committee Report and the review made to the Fiji National University (FNU) 2016 Annual Report.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Fiji National University is a young and dynamic university with Colleges that have deep roots reaching back to the 19th Century with a clear vision to provide education and training which is aimed at employability - either to ensure that new graduates are highly employable or to assist those already in the workforce to advance their careers. The University is committed to the highest standards of ethics, integrity, transparency, corporate governance and professional standards.

It is interesting to note that for the first time in 2016, female graduates of 1,629 exceeded male graduates of 1,604 respectively. Taking into consideration the gender composition in staff from different disciplines, the Committee noted that FNU's administrative staff were predominantly in favour of females whilst the academic staff remained male-dominated.

Despite facing some challenges that hindered the University in fully implementing its vision, the University continued to enhance and strengthen its organisational and management structure through fostering coherence and co-operation across the University in its teaching, research and service and promoting the efficient and effective deployment of resources across its Campuses and Centres.

The Committee noted in 2016, FNU undertook a major Academic Portfolio Review designed to assess the academic quality of its programmes. It was also very pleasing to note that FNU continues to provide education and training which is aimed at employability.

On the same token, through a presentation by Professor Nigel Healey of FNU, the Committee was made aware that FNU had made great strides since 2016 to improve on their infrastructure, programmes, research and overall service delivery.

The Committee acknowledges and commends the overall performance and achievements of the University however, a few recommendations have been proposed for FNU's consideration.

I thank the Chairperson, the Honourable Viam Pillay and my fellow Members: Honourable Salote Radrodro, Honourable Ruveni Nadalo, Honourable Anare T. Vadei and Alternate Member, Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou and their contribution towards the scrutiny and the formulation of this bipartisan Report.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I commend this Committee Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- 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. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER:- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

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 agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to ask his question.

QUESTIONSOral Questions**Colour Coding Number Plates - PSV Taxis
(Question No. 196/2018)**

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, before I ask my question, I beg your indulgence to say “Hello” to the students and parents of Nasauvere Primary School; *ni bula vinakwa*.

Madam Speaker, my question is:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport advise the House on the rationale behind the introduction of the colour coding number plates for Public Service Vehicle taxis

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, this initiative is part of the recent tax industry reform which is one of the key focus in line with the recent amendments under the Land Transport Public Service Vehicle (Amendment) Regulation 2017. It is also to improve and modernise services within the Fiji’s taxi industry, and also we need some structured framework.

This Reform includes the demarcation of 34 identified Transport Zones developed with the intention of improving transport access to meet the increasing customer demand for efficient and reliable taxi services. Madam Speaker, the introduction of the Transport Zone is expected to improve customer services.

On the purpose of zone coding of number plates, it is to ensure transparency and assist the enforcement operation, Madam Speaker. These plates will enable Enforcement Officers to easily identify and monitor taxis operating within a zone.

Madam Speaker, we had some legal taxis, we have also got a lot of cases where taxi operators operating in other areas well away from the bases they were given, thus depriving their customers from having accessible and reliable taxi services. Furthermore, the taxi services will be better managed and will be able to meet the demand present in each zone as permits will be distributed based on the zone population.

For example, a taxi running in the Suva Zone will have plate numbers in the format SU 001, SU 002, SU 003, et cetera, for Suva. The plate colour for all taxis running in the Northern Division is a shade of orange; while the Western taxi plate colour is sky blue; and this is followed by the lime green plate for the Central Division, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain whether his Ministry has been prosecuting taxi operators who are operating outside their zones or do you intend to start now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I can repeat that.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain whether his Ministry has been prosecuting taxi operators who are operating outside their zone or does he intend to start prosecuting now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the Enforcement Officers have been issuing Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) to people who have been operating illegally but as we all know, we are all human beings. Our Enforcement Officers cannot be in all corners throughout the country, which is why this system is now in place. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Just a question on whether there was a study conducted regarding the introduction of this coding system; and how much did it cost the taxpayers? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, there has been consultation with the stakeholders and I cannot get the issue of cost that you are raising, I really do not understand. The only cost that the permit holders will have to pay is for the plate, that is it. Thank you.

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

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his response.

You have four zones which include the Municipal Councils and the City Councils. In the last Budget, we heard that the taxi base fees were exempt. Why are they considering to levy taxi base fees to the Town Councils, Municipal Councils, including City Councils?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, if you read the notice in the advertisement in the *Fiji Sun*

....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Do you want the answers?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- When people saw this they thought that it is open, it is not open yet, it is just to advise the public on the process. Right now, LTA is processing all the old applications and that is why it says that all members of the general public are informed that once the LTA calls for application in any of the below mentioned zone, should there be a need for a taxi permit, then and only the members of the general public from that particular zone can make an application, that is No. 1, so in

other words, Councils have retained the base so people will have to pay the base fee till such time this comes into force. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; the reality on the ground is that, there is already an existing process in place - the stickers on the taxis that identify the zone which they come from. How different will this colour coding to the existing system that you are trying to introduce, in terms of effectiveness?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is the regional colour coding - Western, Northern, Central but the one that the Honourable Member is talking about is each town and city, that is the difference, so that is the reality, Honourable Member.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Semesa Karavaki?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question to the Honourable Minister is in the zoning reform that you are talking about, Honourable Minister. Do you have a return base in the zone of which taxis coming from the other zones can come and use in preparation for their return to their original zone?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member. Yes, Madam Speaker, in some towns and cities we do have but in certain areas we do not. There is a demand and we are looking for space where we want to have those types of services provided, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu to ask his question.

Functions of 3DP Coastal Radio Station
(Question No. 197/2018)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security inform the House on the functions of the 3DP Coastal Radio Station?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA (Minister for Defence and National Security).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu for the question.

The Suva 3DP Radio Coastal Station broadcasts the maritime safety information to ships within Fiji waters and the Maritime Safety Information is promulgated by the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) and it stipulates hazards and dangers to navigation of which seafarers are to be aware of.

The Suva Radio 3DP will broadcast this essential maritime safety information every six hours. The Coastal Radio Station also monitors radio distress frequencies and coordinates radio traffic and relays ship to ship, and ship to land radio traffic.

Additionally, Meteorological information is also broadcasted to ships, along with navigational safety information. Ships send positional updates to Suva Radio, allowing the Centre to monitor vessel movements within Fiji waters.

The role of the Suva Radio and RCC is part of Fiji's international obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention. Madam Speaker, this international obligation is mandated by the Government to the Republic of the Fijian Navy because of the capacity and expertise, infrastructure and capability.

Also it must be noted, Madam Speaker, as well that professional development towards these roles are offered through military cooperation programmes with Defence Forces of Australia, India, China, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- A supplementary question. Madam Speaker, listening to the Honourable Minister, may I ask, how effective was the 3DP Coastal Radio Station during our recent extreme weather events because maritime safety of passenger vessels seem to be at an all-time low very recently. How effective was this system for maritime during the hurricane season?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member. Very effective.

(Laughter)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, whether the radio stations in outer maritime islands that used to exist before and facilitated by 3DP Suva Radio are still in place, mostly in terms of meteorological information in regards to the weather or are we going with the mobile now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me thank the Honourable Member for that question. Yes, by all means, the 3DP Coastal Radio Station is using all communication systems with the outer islands in terms of communications.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula .

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We have had a disaster by a Patterson Brothers' Ship, *Altruism*, did the radio station play any role there in search and rescue in relation to that disaster?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member. As I have said before, this 3DP Coastal Radio Station is very much in communication with all disasters in the Fiji waters.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question, can the Honourable Minister inform the House if there are any plans to improve the current coverage of the 3DP Coastal Radio Station platform?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member. There are plans to relocate the Suva Radio to Naimawi Street in Lami. The location is much more elevated with room for expansion and further developments. The reliability of the site has been tested by the Navy Communications Branch earlier this year and the site proved to be an ideal location for the Suva Radio 3DP.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. Can the Honourable Minister advise what is the range of the size of vessels that is required to have this 3DP radio stations?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- As I said before, this site is elevated and communications to all Fiji waters.

Progress of Recruitment
(Question No. 198/2018)

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

It was announced in the last Budget 2017-2018 that 200 new primary school teachers and 50 new secondary school teachers will be recruited by the Ministry. Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications inform the House on the progress of the recruitment?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Madam Speaker, out of the 200 new primary school teachers, all 200 positions have been filled, 189 have been posted to primary schools in the different parts of Fiji, I have got a list here, if the Honourable Member wants it. However, 11 of them actually have been posted to Special Schools.

As you know we have Special Schools throughout Fiji. Madam Speaker, the Special Schools are:

1. Nasavusavu Special School;
2. Fiji School for the Blind;
3. Suva Special School;
4. South Taveuni Primary School;
5. Nora Fraser Special School;
6. Sunshine Special School;
7. Hilton Early Intervention Centre;

8. Ba School for Special Education; and
9. Sigatoka Special School.

Out of the 50 new Secondary School teacher positions, Madam Speaker, 45 actually have been filled, the other five have not been filled because they are looking specifically for teachers in specified areas, in particular in the areas of Mathematics, Physics, Computers, Biology, Chemistry and Home Economics and we hope to have them to be filled up soon. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. What is the salary scale of the new recruits in this cadre, is it commensurate with qualification or experience under the Civil Service Reforms?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the question does not directly relate to this but obviously the special criteria for different positions within the teacher cadre now and I can give that at a later stage to what the scales are. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S. V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and thank you Honourable Minister, for your explanation. The question is, those 200 new school teachers, will that fill the demand by the schools or there are still schools that do not have teachers?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is not right to say that they do not have teachers. The important issue is to increase the teacher:student ratio, that is what we are targeting at.

Obviously, we have some schools where the entire school roll is 89 students. I went to a school in Teidamu where in Classes 1 to 8, they have (I think) about 80 students in the entire school and they have what we call composite classes. But, of course overall, Madam Speaker, some schools are pretty large schools too. So the teacher:student ratio is not as to the requirement that we want. In some schools we have one teacher, for example, for 20 students, others have one teacher to about 30 to 40 students, so we need to constantly review that and, in fact, improve that ratio.

But at the same time, Madam Speaker, it is not about saying, "All right, let us get more teachers", because when we get more teachers also, you need to put in more classrooms, the infrastructure behind that. If, for example, you have more teachers in a school where we need to build teachers' quarters, so it is a holistic approach to be able to address that issue.

Some schools, of course, we have already arranged where they are fairly large, we will have to put in two or three classrooms then we bring in teachers. We cannot simply bring in the teachers without the classrooms. So, Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Member needs to understand that. The issue here is about constantly improving that ratio to provide a lot more teacher:student contact with more so, one-on-one type of scenario where they can give more direct attention.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, this recruitment has resulted in the removal of some teachers who were there for many reasons, some because they failed the newly introduced examination, some because their contract has expired and some of them are waiting at home. What will happen to these people, some of whom are still waiting at home now?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member needs to do better than that. If he has got specific examples, please, give us the names and we will address it because I cannot actually rely on the information he presents to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. This is on the Special Schools of which you have said Honourable Minister, that there were 11 assigned to that. My question is, what additional training programmes do these school teachers undertake to better prepare them for those Special Schools?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. As she would know as a former Minister for Education, that we have very few teachers who are specifically specialised in teaching at Special Schools. There are not many teachers who actually want to pursue that specialisation. Some of them do it, some of them actually want to teach at the school simply because they have the passion to teach. They have a particular level of affinity to go and teach the students with special needs, but in respect of specific qualifications, some of them, for example, need to get it offshore.

Last Friday, I was at the Frank Hilton School. They are doing a fantastic job. In the budgetary allocation of this year we have, in fact, allocated over \$800,000 in that respect. I met this young lady who is making interventions at early childhood level in respect to speech. In fact that training is not available through any of our tertiary institutions.

They have an Australian lady who has come in and she holds classes for them, there are two ladies who are actually training them. So she as a local is now imparting that knowledge and using that knowledge. There is a constant need to be able to review and provide those sorts of avenues. Many of these qualifications, specialisations are not available and I would like to, in particular, use this opportunity to thank the CEO of Frank Hilton School for the enthusiasm she has shown and she has actually brought in a lot of specialists to actually train Fijian teachers to get a particular level of specialisation to teach at Special Schools.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, time has caught up with us. We will now break for refreshment and we will resume at 11.00 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.31 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.02 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ruveni Nadalo to ask his question.

Progress of OHS - Diving Industry
(Question No. 199/2018)

HON. R.N. NADALO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations explain to the House the progress of the OHS in the diving industry in Fiji?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Nadalo for his question.

On the area of OHS in the diving industry in Fiji, the Ministry had actually passed a Diving Regulation to cover the Health and Safety at Work in this particular sector back in 2006. The development of that Regulation was a result of a lot of consultations with all the stakeholders in that industry starting back from 1997 to 2005, but the implementation of that Regulation due to the new technical and legal requirements, the diving industry needed time to prepare themselves so the commencement of the date for enforcement was delayed to 6th June, 2014.

But from the period 2006 to 2014, the Ministry has been working together with the Department of Fisheries and other stakeholders, such as the Fiji Navy, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Fiji Dive Operators Association, Fiji Recompression Chamber Facility and the Beche-de-mer Organisation to try to see whether we could curb diving accidents in the fishing commercial sector. There were inspection guidelines developed, there was a lot of awareness that was conducted to employers, suppliers and owners of dive equipment all around Fiji.

The intent of this Diving Regulation of 2006 was to try to address the issue of dive-related accidents. We know we have had a lot of those problems and in particular the three main causes of accidents happening in this area. These are the major causes of accidents:

1. Personal factors - people having a lack of awareness on the diving risk and lacking dive training and the motivation for quick money. People not fully understanding the potential dangers of diving;
2. Equipment factors - defective and poorly maintained dive equipment, so for the enforcement of the regulations, the inspectors now go out and actually inspect the equipment that is used by those that are undertaking diving;
3. Unsafe dive practices - the lack of supervision and absence of the emergency treatment equipment.

Since the enactment of the Diving Regulations, dive accidents have been reduced by around 40 percent. We hope that this number will continue to reduce with more inspection and enforcement by the OHS inspectorate nationwide. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I just wish to observe, Madam Speaker, that in recreational diving which is related to tourism, a lot of our youth can be trained to be divers for excursions, scuba and the like. Perhaps, this could be something that the Honourable Minister for Youth can also consider to help train our youths in the villages, but as we stand here today, where can they go for training?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, my Ministry is not engaged in the provision of training and we do not regulate the actual training of people to become divers, but what we do is that, our inspectors go and make sure that the people who are doing the diving or the dive masters that they are trained and certified.

I think in terms of training, there are some PADI certified trainers who are around the place who do this sort of diving. I cannot remember who exactly they are, but there is someone around here in Suva who work together with our staff in doing this. So there are some areas around Fiji where there are these registered PADI dive instructors who can undertake that training.

I am sure the Honourable Minister for Youth & Sports after listening to your comment, that he may wish to look further into that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Parmod Chand

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for that answer. My question is, how many bend facilities (that is, facilities to help those who suffer from bends while surfacing during diving) are in Fiji and which public facilities are they located at?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The recompression facility is not located in my Ministry but the Ministry of Health and Medical Services provide that facility. I am hearing from the Honourable Assistant Minister that that facility is provided at the CWM Hospital in Suva.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, most of the problems arise in rural areas, villages, and not so much in the diving schools or in the hotels. My question is, how does the Ministry monitor those who are carrying these equipment in order to enforce the Regulation?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have actually conducted a lot of awareness. The inspectors have gone around to conduct this awareness. There has been a lot of stakeholder awareness moving around in various parts of Fiji. The main intent is that if you are diving, first you have to make sure that you are certified because at the moment, people just willy-nilly put it on and they believe without fully understanding the dangers that are involved, they start getting into it.

The focus of the Ministry is to try to make sure that anyone who is diving, we want them to be inspected. Hopefully, we will also work with other *Rokos* and Provincial Administrators to see how we can facilitate this better. But we want to make sure that people who are diving have gone through the proper training, the equipment that they use is the proper equipment and during the inspections, the inspectors will actually go and vet and check that equipment, to try to make sure that people are safe while they carry out the diving that they are doing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister mentioned that there is a 40-percent reduction in the incidences of bends as a result of scuba diving. Can the Honourable Minister explain on what sectors of the industry that that 40 percent comes from or the other 60 percent that is still there - whether it is from illegal diving fisheries or other sectors? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the statement that I actually read was that the dive accidents had been reduced by 40 percent. So, that would include probably the bends, et cetera, but it includes all other types of accidents. I do not have with me the categorisation of those accidents so the statistics that I was given was that those accidents have been reduced by 40 percent, the details of those information had not been provided.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, my question has been covered by the Honourable Member.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The last question, Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answers. Is the diving equipment of each tourist-oriented dive facility or industry inspected to ensure its safety and compliance, just like we have in a state of preparedness for other industries and factories?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, Madam Speaker, under this Regulation, that equipment has to be inspected and our Inspectors are trained to carry out that inspection to make sure that the equipment is not faulty and that the lives of the people who are working there, especially in resorts when you have people coming from offshore to use the equipment. There is also a requirement that if you are using the equipment you have to be medically fit, you need to be seen to be medically fit to use that equipment.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

Asian Subterranean Termite in Declared Emergency
(Question No. 200/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications briefly explain what types of awareness exercises have been provided to monitor and control the Asian Subterranean Termite in Declared Emergency areas such as Lautoka and Labasa, including other high risk areas?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question.

Madam Speaker, the Asian subterranean termites are predominantly in Lautoka and Labasa, as we have seen. It is obviously a new species coming in obviously and that is why we need to protect our biodiversity. It is exotic to Fiji and as we know, it feeds on timber and other wooden products. It obviously has a negative intervention into the biodiversity.

In the last four years, the agency that has been responsible for this which is the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) had actually allocated in excess of half a million dollars as part of the declaration of these specific areas to control these termites. There have been huge levels of public awareness created. If you go to Lautoka and places like that, you will see that a lot of people switch off their lights at night, in the evening time because that is when those termites actually come out. That is when they actually mate, in fact, they are mating whilst flying around.

This is an interesting piece of information. Those termites are actually buried very deeply in the soil and that is why it is very hard to get to. Their nest is about 6 feet to 18 feet underground and branch out in all directions in search for food.

There are four types of these termites, one is the “soldier” (which is actually sterile), protects the colony; even the “worker” which is also sterile, brings food to the queen. They have a queen which is their adult female which only reproduces and are found under the soil, making them difficult to locate and then you have the drones which is the adult male that reproduce with the queen.

It is quite interesting but, of course, very dangerous group of insects. What has actually happened, Madam Speaker, we have had a number of newspaper articles, television advertisements, radio advertisements, radio talk-back shows and, of course, awareness through visitations, going to villages, schools, business houses, carnival booths, island resorts, et cetera.

There has also been mobile awareness that we have created where BAF actually goes around. They, in fact, neutrally go around using a hailer to advise residents of the “dos and don’ts” during the Asian Termite Swarming (ATS) period. They have been to places like Vitogo, Lovu seaside, Naikabula, Field 40, Saru Back Road, Natabua, Saru and Tawatawa - all of these are the places they have visited.

Madam Speaker, you will see, as I have been mentioning they will switch off the lights and then people light fires outside. The whole idea is to attract these flying termites to the fire where they can actually get incinerated literally. So, Madam Speaker, this is the type of public awareness that has been created. We also have hotlines, we also have a website that people can go to and get information. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Parmod Chand?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, recently there was a piece of land that was being filled in Labasa and later on, they found out that termites were there. It is all about houses, et cetera, but the second thing is, are our timber forest-safe from termite infestation because we still have not heard officially that termites cannot attack our forests or raw undried timber?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I think timber and living trees are different. We have seen that when you have untreated timber that comes from the trees, they are a lot more vulnerable. So in fact if you have entire homes that have been built with untreated timber, they actually get into it too.

In respect of the actual trees, there are far lesser incidents of that. In fact, still a lot more research is being done in that area. At one stage there was also talk about whether they would get into the sugarcane itself and start eating those.

So again there has been far less occurrence of that happening and far less occurrence in actual living trees but most definitely as soon as you cut down the trees and it is untreated timber, they are more readily actually able to attack the timber that is untreated.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question; apart from the awareness by BAF, what programmes are in place to actually try and eradicate these termites?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The BAF actually does go out and engage in eradication of this. Obviously, I have to say that these termites are sometimes very difficult to locate because they are underground most of the time, they only come out at night time or in the evening, round about dusk.

Madam Speaker, we also have the use of traps and they use baits; traps with baits are placed in substrata layer of soil and are monitored in certain areas, for example, Honourable Chand was referring to the few particular areas where termites maybe found, they actually put traps there.

Again, Madam Speaker, we could use chemicals. In fact, one of the major chemicals used in infected buildings is called "termiticide". Actually BAF goes and sprays some of these buildings. As you may have known in Nadi and Lautoka, they have gone to actual private homes and found termites which BAF actually puts chemicals or injects chemicals into the timber with the hope that the termites will actually stop eating and actually go away. So they are the kind of measures that are being taken apart from the public awareness.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. How well are these interventions working in terms of the homes, schools, vegetable gardens that the termites are boring into, how well are the interventions working in terms of containment and control because there are several different types of termites and this is just one of them?

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

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Are you collecting data on it, Sir?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I do not have any specific data available with me but if the Honourable Leader of the Opposition would have warned me, I could have brought some data. But in respect of the campaign itself against the termites, as we said we need to take a number of measures and because of the very insidious nature of this particular insect, everyone needs to not just rely on BAF itself, but to actually participate in that.

As far as the vegetable gardens are concerned, we do not think there is much of an attack on vegetable gardens. There tends to be less on that but it is more predominantly as he highlighted, in schools, wooden buildings, homes, of course, they are the more vulnerable structures to these termites and again we have huge focus on that.

The other part, of course, Madam Speaker, is to enforce the building codes. We have to ensure that people actually use treated timber. This is why the Fiji Pine Limited is actually doing a much better job than what they used to. We now have very sophisticated methodologies of ripping timber and also treatment of timber and again, I urge Honourable Members to actually go to Tropik Wood and see how they are usually treating this timber out in very sophisticated village, et cetera. Once you are able to do that, then the vulnerability actually reduces quite significantly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question, given the problems these areas are facing in terms of these termites, would the Honourable Minister consider some budgetary increase in terms of fighting these termites?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, if you would notice that we have increased budgetary funding for BAF over the past number of years. You have an Operating Grant and also the Capital Grant, and BAF also raises its revenue itself, so those are the three sources of funding that they can use in particular for the operational grants and also in respect of the funding that they raised themselves. You will see that they themselves have constantly been focussing as part of their budgetary expenditure to focus more on the eradication of termites.

The whole idea is to mitigate the risk further as opposed to complete eradication that would be extremely difficult at this point in time.

HON. SPEAKER.- The last question, Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. In terms of the containment by way of transportation of these insects like we have the taro beetle being the beetle that prohibits the transportation of dalo tops. Now the locations are in Labasa as well as in Lautoka, whereas the other areas will be exposed too for the transportation of these beetles to these areas. Is there any Biosecurity measure in place to prevent the transportation of these insects?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Madam Speaker, as you know that we have declared now and still declared what we call "certain areas of termite infested areas". They are declared to be the high risk areas. BAF in those areas actually does carry out random checks, entry and exit, in and out of those areas to ensure the termite host material is illegally transported out of the declared zones. So, for example, if someone maybe tearing down timber from their house and could be infected from the infested area, BAF can actually stop them from taking the timber out into an area that is not infected.

All termite host materials are inspected and cleared by BAF officials prior to its movement outside the declared zones. All infested materials are required to be destroyed preferably burnt on site to suppress termite population further to determine its spread to a new site. Compulsory monitoring is conducted on infested sites to ensure the infestation is eliminated.

Madam Speaker, again as highlighted in the sugarcane issue, the BAF is also working in collaboration with the Fiji Sugar Research Institute of Fiji to monitor farms and also to use the bating method in the farm areas where they suspect and they put baits under the ground to ensure that the termites are actually destroyed. It is a high risk if we had large scale infestation into our sugarcane sector but that currently is contained in that respect.

Seasonal Worker Programme - New Zealand and Australia
(Question No. 201/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations explain how many women have participated in the seasonal employment to New Zealand and Australia since its commencement in 2015?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. We have been involved in this Seasonal Worker Programme in Australia and in New Zealand since 2015 and since that year, we have sent around 1,395 workers to both of these countries.

From that period, out of that 1,395; 131 of them have been females. So that is just slightly below 10 percent of the total number. The women workers that we are sending, most of them are in Australia, a lot of them are working in the hotel and accommodation sector, they are working at a particular resort there. In other countries, they also work in the horticultural sector, some of them are out in the farms, but most of them are in the packing houses where they put the harvest together, pack them, grade them and send them out for distribution to wherever their markets are. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jilila Kumar.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker; a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. What is the Ministry planning to do to increase employment opportunities for women under this Seasonal Employment Scheme?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, we know that most of the workers who have been going, I have expressed that 90 percent of them are men and a lot more women have been wanting to go, so we have been looking internally on how we can try to increase the number because the way the Seasonal Worker Scheme works, the employer sends the requirements and we give them the database and they themselves select who they want. So, we need to be able to target employers in particular that are looking for females of particular types of occupations that require females.

One of the things that we are doing now, we are trying to market and network with potential employers in both countries who might be looking for more female workers. We are actually also corresponding with these employers directly upfront. Once we know them, rather than waiting for them to come, we start offering our services of providing human workers, strengthening women projects and also more training and assessment to see if we can increase women's employability.

Both of the countries (Australia and New Zealand) that we send our women workers to are also organising some programmes to help Pacific Island sending nations on how we can get more women participation, and in both these countries, there is a lot of focus now on the global trend of trying to incorporate gender approaches to development. So there is lot more focus on meeting some of the Sustainable Development Goals requirements: SDG 1- eradicating poverty; SDG 5 -

gender equality; SDG10 - reduce inequalities, and what is important for us is SDG 8 - decent work and economic growth.

Next week, there will be a workshop held in New Zealand where we will be sending a team, together with other countries and they will be looking at this particular issue of how we can strengthen women's participation in seasonal work. So we are hoping that together with what we learn from this workshop and our own targeted approach here from Fiji, we might be able to enhance the employment opportunities for women in the Seasonal Worker Programmes.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. We continuously hear from the other side of the House on increasing gender equality and the figures given by the Honourable Minister is a clear demonstration of how women are being treated as far as employment is concerned. Those statistics speak volumes about how our women are valued in regards to this overseas worker's programme.

We also hear that they will be looking at ways to send more women overseas. So what kind of, maybe some kind of review in the trade agreements with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or some kind of work agreements whereby we can access more women to send to these kinds of similar programmes in overseas. Otherwise, Madam Speaker, we will continue to hear from the other side of the House that "we will do these things to increase more women's participation", but it is not going to happen if they do not review trade agreements and some kind of regulations to be able to send more women. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, she has actually proposed a recommendation on how to address this and I think her first part of the question, you have already answered.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can I just say a few things, Madam Speaker? I think the Honourable Member is very passionate and in fact becomes very apparent when she talks about gender issues. I think from this side of Government, women are very important to us. Everyone is important but you have to remember that we do not dictate who is chosen by the employer. The employer chooses according to his preference. If he feels that apple picking and apple harvesting requires strong men, he is going to ask for strong men, he is going to do that.

If there is a particular type of job that he wants most men, that is what he is going to select. We do not stop it. This is a demand-driven thing, whatever they demand, what they want we try to provide. If they need more women, how can we reverse it? If the farm there is going to pick apples which requires strong men to climb and carry 20 kilogrammes baskets up and down ladders, how are we going to tell them that "You should take short people who do not have the ability to climb up and down the ladder."

(Laughter)

We are not going to dictate it; it is demand-driven. We have to respond to what the needs are. We cannot dictate, but as I have already explained, we have a number of measures in place to try to enhance women. We have a group of women that we know who went from Vaturova. I actually went and visited the place that they worked up in Kerikeri, North of Auckland. The employer was very happy with their performance and I am sure they are going to continue to return and as these women also get a good reputation in terms of the work, there will be more employers that will be looking for the women from Fiji. We will do our utmost best and we will continue to do our utmost

best and we have been doing our utmost best to provide opportunities for the women of this country.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. As given that the Seasonal Work Programme is demand-driven, at present the current selection criteria of passing physical fitness test, passing rapid upper limb assessment and an acceptable body mass index less than 29, Madam Speaker, automatically rules out most of our women. My question is, has the criteria for physical test changed to allow more women, youth and people living outside the *tikina* and villages to be eligible under this scheme?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to correct one thing that the Honourable Member said, their BMI has now moved up to 31, so it is not 29. Physical fitness is still there and medical assessments are still there.

A few years ago, the Honourable Member here went to Australia, they went to a farm where there had been 20 workers who have come from Fiji working on this farm, it was a tomato-picking farm. By the time they got to that farm, 14 of the people from Fiji had disappeared, only six were left and two of those were small ladies from the Sigatoka Valley, who are used to picking tomatoes. So we have found that even those small women with that small built were able to do well even though the hard-body-built people ran away from the farm. These small young women were able to do it; so we believe that this shows also

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nadroga.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, Nadroga, of course.

(Laughter)

But I think it is very important for us. This has been one of the differences between the Fiji product and the product of other nations, that we make sure the Fiji product goes through the medical assessment and the fitness, so that when they go there, they are physically fit.

The feedback that we have been getting so far, I have now been to New Zealand I think last year and again this year, the process that we put people through to select the Fiji product is working. Members who are coming now from our *tikina* teams are getting an enhanced reputation and that system is giving us dividends, and we hope that as a result of that, there will be more demand for workers to come from Fiji, including Fiji women.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niumataiwalu.

HON. RATU T.N. NIUMATAIWALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I must thank the Government for this initiative and I believe that the priority objective is to create employment for youths and develop them for their future. Madam Speaker, I have two questions.

HON. SPEAKER.- You are allowed only one.

HON. RATU T.N. NIUMATAIWALU.- Can the Honourable Minister inform this House the effectiveness of this scheme? Secondly, is there any initiative

HON. SPEAKER.- Only one question.

HON. RATU T.N. NIUMATAIWALU.- Sorry. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I think the effectiveness is to be seen: one in the increase in the numbers of our people who are going; and secondly, what they are able to do when they come back.

I think maybe last week or the week before, I saw in the newspapers the photo of a young man from Udu in Totoya, I think, who came back and saved around \$20,000. With that money, he was able to buy a boat. I met another one who bought a boat, bought an engine. Some of them have been able to put their one-third, two-thirds for Rural Housing; I do not know what that particular programme is, so they are able to make that a sort of investment.

I have a story here of a lady from Tailevu, Avisake Rabo returned from Australia after participating in this. She is actually from Naimasimasi. With her hard-earned income, she was able to fix her house, start a *duruka* farm where she paid for the people in the village to actually dig and plant *duruka* and she has started to harvest it. So they are making significant impact on their own lives and the lives of the people around them so in terms of effectiveness, there are a lot of those success stories around.

There are still a lot of things that we need to improve but we will work on it so that we can get more of our people across.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dr. Mere Samisoni

HON. DR. M.T. SAMISONI.- Thank you. I know you mentioned training, which is good. If I could just share a story and then go on to the question. My question is, how much training do you give them because my home helper said to me, "Oh I want to go, I want to get some money." I said, "All right, how long will you be away for?" And till we worked it out, she went with her husband. She was very very happy. My point to her was, "Please, save your money." When she came back after six weeks, her husband had been there for three months, and I said, "How much money did you save? Were you able to save something between the two of you?" She said, "Oh, no, no, no! By the time everyone got their cut, I got nothing."

My point is feedback, please, Madam Speaker. My point is feedback. We need to look at these cases and help them out before they go or come back. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, if someone goes on a three-month seasonal work, that is most probably not part of this particular programme, because in this programme, it is six months or seven months. We know that there are people who go on visitor's visa and go and do work on the side. Those people are not part of this programme.

This programme, there is an agreement between two Governments and as part of that agreement, if you go to one of the countries, either Australia or New Zealand, one of them; half of the air fare is paid by the employer. The employer actually invests in the person coming across. One of the other countries, I am not too sure whether Australia or New Zealand, \$500 of your air fare is paid by the employer. So in these sorts of conditions, it is monitored, when an employer wants to take workers from the Pacific, that employer has to apply to the New Zealand and Australian Government.

The New Zealand and Australian Governments come and vet them:

1. do you have good accommodation;
2. have you been fair with your workers in the past; and
3. what is your record in treatment with workers?

Once they pass that, then they get their approval to come to recruit. There are people in our country now who are using visitors' visa to go; that is not part of this programme. Those are not the seasonal workers that I am talking about. I know it still happens. They go on visitor's visa, and they got work on the side. That is not part of this.

This particular programme, we know is monitored by us, it is monitored by our counterparts in Australia and New Zealand to try to make sure that they have maximum, optimal returns with what they get back. From the programme that we have had, I think the returns have been much better than what the Honourable Member has been referring to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The next question will be the eighth question and I will not entertain any more question after this. So last question, Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- How do returning seasonal workers make a difference in their families and communities as a result of their participation in the seasonal workers' programme?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Seasonal workers make a difference in their families, I think I have mentioned that briefly. I gave you some examples, I also have examples of the two men who came too from two villages; Nasukamai and the village close to it in Ra. Both of them were hired by one particular company. They worked so well, both of them saved \$20,000 each when they came back to Fiji, each in Fiji dollars, not in Australian dollars.

They had a good reputation, and when they came back, their company told the guy from Nasukamai, "Look, you have worked so well, what I want you to do, go to your village and look for another four people that are hard workers like you and next year, bring them back." He told the other guy, I have forgotten the name of the village, "You bring two guys." So, the impact of these two, they went and did well and because of their good reputation, they gave an opportunity for another six people from their village just to go and do the same thing.

So, I think that has had an impact, not on themselves but their whole community. So, I actually met the group when I went to New Zealand last year. I went to see the original two and the other four, so there is a lot of good positive stories like these.

I had just talked about these good positive stories about Avisake Rabo from Naimasimasi who set up a *duruka* farm, and there is a lot of these good stories around. So, it is having an impact on their lives, their children and the community around them. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Cyclone Assistance Relief Effort (CARE)
(Question No. 202/2018)

HON. P. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament of the total amount spent so far on the various programmes of Cyclone Assistance Relief Effort (CARE)?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. (Attorney General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, part of these questions were answered yesterday when I gave the Ministerial Statement.

But as we know because these initiatives are being rolled out, and teams are going out on a daily basis, the latest update as of 16th May, Madam Speaker, is that the government spends \$9.937 million on e-Transport Care, assisting 188,978 adults and 17,821 students; \$30.592 million on the Homes Care assisting 25,233 households; \$17.23 million in Farms Care, assisting 35,370 farmers; and \$1.136 million on Welfare Care, assisting 13,161 Social Welfare recipients. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question, I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. I just want to ask the Honourable Minister if there is a budgetary allocation for this CARE Programme? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member does know that there is no budgetary allocation because there was no CARE Initiative in this Budget Estimates, you would remember that but as the Honourable Member would also know that in the budgetary allocation, we did have some Contingency Funds set aside for such events.

Of course, the funding was not to the tune of approximately \$58 million which is what we have already spent but as you would also know being a former civil servant that when you do have this type of expenses come about, we do what we call “redeployment of funds” and they can be sourced from within.

For example, the Ministry of Agriculture has seen savings from the various expenditures that they have allocated then they are able to source it through that, so they vire it within that process, and of course, within, for example, various other Heads that people may be able to reallocate funds, similarly with the Ministry of Social Welfare, they are able to vire funds and we then can redeploy funds in that perspective.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, one of the concerns raised by the Auditor-General in relation to things like this, is money not properly managed and used for its purpose. Here we have heard survey being done and people are coming to get assistance outside of the survey so what guarantee or assurance does the government have that this money will be used for the purpose it is decided for and the people who qualify for it?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for this question. The Honourable Member, I think, was absent for most of the day yesterday when we actually answered issues pertaining to this and, Madam Speaker, when he was not here, we did address the issue that there are some people who, of course, are dishonestly trying to obtain funds.

It is a fact, like in *TC Winston* and some people have been charged. You saw that in *TC Winston* where there is a gentleman, who a few months back, was charged because of the way he was actually able to go and get a multiple number of cards under different names and that was picked up by the audit team. So the safeguards are the audit teams, of course.

There is also a certain level of trust that we give to the ordinary Fijian people who are going and applying for these funds. I mean I have heard some stories even this morning as I highlighted yesterday to Parliament that there were some people in fact who went and changed their residential address with the Election's Office, simply so that they could qualify to be in a particular area, and then they went and applied, it does happen.

We are obviously doing audit trail that people who are out in the field, like yesterday in Lawaqa Park, Sigatoka, they were serving people right till about 3.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. this morning because everyone is queued up there. So we are obviously trying to manage those issues as Honourable Vuniwaqa highlighted.

I said yesterday again some people turned up and said that we are making an application for my mother who is ill or my grandmother who is ill, or father who is ill and then when the staff says, "All right, let us go and see your sick grandmother or bedridden grandmother", they would very quickly disappear from the line. So there are some people who do try their luck and, of course, we need to ensure that as we keep on putting up messages that, "Please, when you make your application, your application need to be genuine, they need to be *bona fide* applications. That is what we can do in that respect.

Obviously we will get very concerned if it keeps on mounting and the queues do not actually stop. We will have to take some further corrective measures but we have put in all the measures in place. We have got the teams out who are going out there into the fields doing random checks.

The Ministry of Social Welfare is managing that also, asking a lot more questions and they readily go out and sometimes do the checks. The Ministry of Agriculture, we have had some complaints where some people are saying, "They have not got it when they should have got it", some then said, "Some other people have got it, then they should not have got it." So again we are trying to manage these issues. Again, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture is on the phone, on *Viber*, et cetera, and simply we are able to coordinate in that fashion.

So, Madam Speaker, there is actually a culture of dishonesty that does exist in a lot of people. Some people do try and take advantage of it, similarly after *TC Winston*, when the FNPF actually allowed people to withdraw funds and said "If you are affected"

But people sitting in Suva, withdrawing \$1,000 and then going up to the nightclub and spending it or going to the Hong Kong Sevens and in that fashion, something like \$256 million was actually withdrawn. So we are closely monitoring the situation and what all of us can do as Honourable Members of Parliament, we need to urge members of the public to be honest.

Last but not the least point, of course, is that they signed a declaration. As you know that we have passed the particular law in Parliament in 2016 post-*TC Winston* before we put the initiative that should they be found they can obviously be charged. The fines are very heavy, they can go to prison up to 10 years, if they are found to be carrying out fraudulent activities. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, can I ask the Honourable Minister to explain what happened in Nadi today? People from all over the interior of Nadi were camping at Prince Charles Park from last night, in anticipation of the distribution of assistance from Government, only to be told this morning that it will be next week. They came from the highlands, from the interior, some people took days off from work to come to Nadi and to be told it will not happen. Can that be explained on what exactly happened, please?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sure, Madam Speaker, this is in respect of the Homes-Care that is administered through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the teams were there, like I said till about 4.00 a.m. or 5.00 a.m. this morning, since yesterday morning at 9.00 a.m., as advertised in the papers that we need to do an area a day. A team was also sent ahead when they realised that they were still going to be stuck in Lawaqa Park to inform them that they will be delayed.

The last communications I have had with the Honourable Minister for Women who is also out there with the team that they will be starting with Nadi later today. We cannot expect the entire Social Welfare Team, who have been up all night because we did not anticipate, in fact, the entire Lawaqa Park Stadium was full. At one point in time the line kind of crawled past the Police Station going up to the *Matamata* area. So, Madam Speaker, obviously there is a lot more people anticipated.

We want to finish off each location. Now, it is what they are doing, what they call the “sweep” between Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki and, of course, Labasa too. The sweep needs to be done and everyone needs to come to these Centres - Lawaqa Park for Sigatoka; Prince Charles Park for Nadi; we expect the Churchill Park or the park next to it, Shirley Park will be for Lautoka and, of course, various other locations in the other areas, Madam Speaker. So, yes, it is because of the numbers that they were delayed. We only have a limited number of people who can actually do that, with a limited number of people that are actually trained in it and messages have been sent out to them, it is unfortunate.

We can say that, should we have them stop all the people who came up from Navosa and told them, “You go back home because we have people from Nadi.” I mean we have to be able to manage the situation and we have limited people who are trained in this area and so it was a question of giving priority to one area where everyone has already come down, finish them all first with all applications and then move on to the next one. So we start with a delay but, I am sure

people understand because this is money that has actually been given out to them which has never been given out with such a passion and, of course, it is for their own personal use.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question. Madam Speaker, I just like to inform the House that since this CARE has been rolled out, of course, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Women have been making statements that only those who are affected by the floods or *TC Josie* and *TC Keni* are entitled and anyone else who comes in will be treated differently, it means they are not entitled. But then the people who are giving out these vouchers are saying that everyone is entitled so I think this is where you have long queues. I think the message out there should be very clear to the people - who is entitled and who is not.

Madam Speaker, the second one is: why is it that only EVR cards are accepted as a form of identification to qualify for the CARE services.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, Madam Speaker. I will answer the second question first. EVR proudly gives your address, and this helps establish where you are from. If I take my ATM card as a form of identification, it does not genuinely qualify because it does not have any address, no photo ID. If I take my driving licence, a lot of people do not have a driving licence so obviously you cannot use that.

EVR card is given to an adult, you are registered to vote, in that way also, we are able to get everyone to register to vote, so, this you know you are killing two birds with one stone. So, it does serve dual purpose.

The issue about who qualifies - no, repeatedly statements have been made that only if you have been affected by the two cyclones then you will qualify, and we have also said, water-damaged caused by the cyclone which also includes flooding.

There are some people who are coming up simply for the e-ticketing card because they are saying that they do not necessarily qualify for the homes.

A lot of the Social Welfare recipients have received their funding and as you can see there is \$1.13 million, it is because that is easy to track with the Ministry of Social Welfare who knows exactly who the Social Welfare recipients are, where they reside and, therefore, they have been topped up with one month's welfare payment, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, there being no other supplementary question, we will now move on to the next item, and I now invite the Honourable Alifereti Nabulivou to ask his question.

Ban or Moratorium on Marine Species
(Question No. 203/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries inform the House on the role the Ministry plays in imposing a ban or moratorium on certain marine species?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Firstly, I would like to highlight the role that the Ministry of Fisheries plays to achieve the sustainable use of all marine resources to ensure its continuous existence. Most of the marine species that have moratoriums imposed on them are usually due to their current unstable status.

Madam Speaker, the decision to set up a moratorium for particular species is usually based on the scientific data which indicates an over-exploited fishery which show signs of rapid declining population. These species are considered to be most vulnerable due to their specific biology and their natural ability to replenish its population.

Madam Speaker, sustaining threatened species means protecting spawning and nesting grounds to ensure species reach maturity and reproduce. The need to set up a moratorium helps to ensure that the economic trade or sale of these species is regulated. The mere reason is that, commercial demand and harvest is the main cause of over-exploitation.

Madam Speaker, an example of such a vulnerable species is those of turtles. Turtles which are harvested for its commercial value in the 1800s and up to the 1990s, this period the turtles are identified to be critically endangered.

While turtles were traded not only for its meat, derivatives and artefacts, it was developed from its parts which made it vulnerable. Noting its vulnerability, the first step in protecting turtles was announced in 1997. Fiji imposed a total ban on the harvest of turtle which was followed by a moratorium announcement that occurred thereafter. This initiative set a perfect platform which helped to initiate the widespread protection of the five turtles species we have in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, moratoriums are important. It allows to implement a precautionary approach when managing our limited resources. For a country such as Fiji, setting up a moratorium allows us to effectively revive depleting or threatened stocks while limiting the impact of commercial demand. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. In light of the moratorium on turtles, can the Honourable Minister explain to this House the existing laws that support the protection of turtles?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Madam Speaker, legislations that support moratoriums are important. As a matter of fact, a legislation provides the teeth and the gist of any activity that it seeks to implement and is no different from what is done within the Ministry of Fisheries.

Firstly, Madam Speaker, turtles are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Additionally, the current Fisheries Act on Protected Species Act, 2002 Schedule 2(a) of the Offshore Fisheries Management Regulations 2014, such provisions protect, harvest and the sale of turtles. Madam Speaker, these laws provide the Ministry of Fisheries with appropriate legislative powers to enforce a ban on the harvest of turtles. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister, please, explain to the House, to what extent is his Ministry imposing restrictions on the use of technology to protect fishing stock as well as fish species that are endangered?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. It basically depends on the scientific data that is provided within our own Ministry's scientific team and also our friends from other NGOs, who provide us with advice on stock within a fishing area.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker; a supplementary question. Could the Honourable Minister explain to the House how one can obtain an exemption to harvest turtles and how the Ministry ensures that turtles are harvested sustainably?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. Madam Speaker, when an individual applies for an exemption to harvest turtles due to a traditional or scientific obligation, the applicant has to apply through the Divisional Office from where the turtle would be harvested from. The applicant needs to specifically provide justification such as:

- the need for an exemption, either traditional or scientific purposes;
- the number of turtles requested;
- the date or period when it will be used; and
- which *qoliqoli* the turtle is going to be harvested from.

Madam Speaker, these are important information that would allow the Ministry of Fisheries to decide whether an application will be approved or declined. Additionally, once that application is approved, an exemption is issued, the Ministry of Fisheries would monitor the harvest and use of these turtles. Monitoring include:

- inspecting the total number of turtles to be harvested;
- appropriate size and shell length;
- sex of turtles;
- the approved *qoliqoli* site; and
- the date in which it should be harvested.

Madam Speaker, these are the requirements to allow Ministry of Fisheries to provide exemptions on the harvest of turtles while ensuring that the sustainable goals through appropriate monitoring is undertaken. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation. My question is on the legislation: its effect and implementation on the aquarium business. How does it affect the aquarium business in regards to live coral? Will it halt the aquarium business or is there some room for consultation with the stakeholders? And if so, what kind of consultation has been undertaken with the stakeholders?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. In normal circumstances where turtles are required for aquariums, normally follow through the same channel as I have said. The turtles can be applied for exemption for traditional purposes or scientific purposes. The aquariums will follow in the

category of scientific purposes and that can also apply through the normal channel. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- I thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. Noting the legislative support, can the Honourable Minister explain the provisions that are in place to allow Fijians to harvest turtles due to cultural obligations? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. As I have alluded to, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries recognises the need for traditional rights of the Fijian people. Turtle is a significant part of the identity of the *iTaukei* tradition and culture. They are used during traditional occasions such as:

- installation of paramount chiefs;
- funerals; and
- other traditional functions such as *vanua* meetings.

While reflecting on these traditional obligations, the Fisheries Legislation under Regulation 27 of the Fisheries Act of 1972 allows the Minister of Fisheries through discretion to give exemptions on the harvest of turtles.

While reflecting of these traditional obligations, the Fisheries Legislation under Regulation 27 of the Fisheries Act of 1972 allows the Minister of Fisheries through discretion to give exemptions on the harvest of turtles.

Madam Speaker, exemptions are given with clear considerations on the type of traditional obligations against the nesting or season of turtles. I would like to reiterate that the Ministry of Fisheries will not allow exemptions from the month of October to April due to the vulnerability of turtle as they nest on our beaches. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prem Singh, the last question.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. I thank the Minister for his answers and my question is, how many more species of fish have been detected to have poisoning, particularly after *TC Winston* and the recent two cyclones we had, because we have had media reports from 2016 that the Fisheries officials indicated that it would take three years to rid poison from toxic reefs after extreme weather events.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Even though it is a totally different question altogether, this is in regards to poisoning but I would like to remind Honourable Prem Singh, if you can just look at the chart that I had provided during that session, that is still the list that we continue to monitor as “poisonous fish”. Thank you.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu to ask his written question.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, just before I proceed with the written question, I seek some clarification as to how I raise the question. Am I to read the whole thing because I have been given this on my table this morning?

HON. SPEAKER.- It is up to you, your question is there, so it is up to you whether you want to read it or it is already printed.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Written Question

Schedule A and Schedule B Land Rent Over the Past 10 Years (Question No. 204/2018)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs specify to the House how much money has been accounted for by the Ministry for Schedule A and Schedule B land rental over the last 10 years?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Acting Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for the question. We will provide a written answer as provided for under the Standing Orders.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on the next item on the agenda.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. The Acting Prime Minister the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications has two Ministerial Statements; and
2. The Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak for five minutes, and the Leader of the NFP or his designate will also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

HON. SPEAKER. - I now call on the Acting Prime Minister to deliver his first Statement.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Update on the 51st Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I rise to provide an update on the 51st Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which was held in Manila, Philippines from 3rd May to 6th May this year, 2018. As part of the Fijian delegation, Madam Speaker, we were accompanied by the Governor of Reserve Bank of Fiji, Permanent Secretary for Economy, another senior official from the Ministry of Economy, RBF and the Office of the Solicitor-General.

Madam Speaker, we also had a team led by the Permanent Secretary for Civil Service. Together with the senior officials from the Fiji Police Force and the Ministry of Civil Service to understudy the logistical and security arrangements at the event as Fiji will be hosting the 52nd Annual Meeting of the ADB in May next year.

Madam Speaker, this will be a very historic event as it will be the first time for any Pacific developing member country to host the ADB Annual Meeting. The larger neighbours within the region, such as Australia and New Zealand hosted the annual meetings respectively in 1969 and 1995, Madam Speaker.

However, apart from the fact that no ADB Annual Meeting has been held in those two countries for the last 23 years, none has ever been held in any of the Pacific Island countries. So Fiji, of course, is very fortunate through its efforts and also the hard work that is being carried out to be actually chosen and indeed is a sign of confidence as being shown in the Fijian Government and also in the country, of course, Madam Speaker..

Madam Speaker, again of course it speaks about the confidence that the multi-lateral agencies have in our ability to host such an event. This will be the largest event that Fiji has ever hosted with an anticipated at least 4,000 participants, including Government delegates, ADB personnel, guests, spouses, observers, civil society organisations, media and other accompanying persons, Madam Speaker.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we were informed that it could actually exceed 4,000 because many people like the idea of coming to Fiji so they bring their spouses and perhaps family members too.

Madam Speaker, we have earlier in May, of course, it will be in early May next year, around about the 3rd to the 5th, it is one of the low periods in our tourism sectors; it fits in well as more rooms will be available and, of course, that will mean more business and more employment opportunities for our staff and workers in the tourism sector, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we have already started preparations towards this and we are fully confident that delivering above expectations in making this a unique experience for all the participants. It will also be an opportunity, Madam Speaker, for us to be able to showcase our Fijian hospitality, of course, our unique culture and development achievements, unique challenges and opportunities in the Pacific.

Madam Speaker, what we have said to the other Pacific Island countries that while Fiji will be physically hosting the meeting, we want to see it more as a Pacific event, to be able to then also as far as some of the subject areas of concern, to be able to hone in as to what are some of the funding requirements in the Pacific Island countries on what we can do in respect of climate vulnerability initiatives.

We have asked our fellow Ministers from the other Pacific Islands for agenda items that they want to highlight and we will be working with the team from the ADB (Asian Development Bank) to be able to ensure in particular provide a focus on climate change, Madam Speaker.

The successful hosting of this meeting, Madam Speaker, will lay the platform for other large multilateral meeting of a similar nature and henceforth develop Fiji's ability to compete in what they call a "Meeting, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibition (MICE) Market", Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it was quite interesting to see some of the senior members of the Fijian Police Force that actually went down and worked behind the scenes with the Philippines Police Force and the Military, the Traffic Police, et cetera, and how they actually ran the entire show.

Madam Speaker, alongside the ADB Meetings in Manila, the Fijian Government also hosted what we call "A Special Future Host Country Event" for the unveiling of the official logo and theme of next year's ADB Annual Meeting which is "Prosperity through Unity".

Madam Speaker, this event was attended by participants in a gymnasium full of participants enjoying Fijian *meke* and I would like to publicly thank the four University Fijian students who are studying in Japan. We actually flew them over from Japan and they did a fantastic job and so the staff that came from our Embassy in Japan and we not only had the *meke*, we had Fijian foods and the *Bula* spirit in Manila.

The participants expressed overwhelming support and excitement towards Fiji hosting the annual event. In fact the ADB Vice President, Mr. Stephen Groff acknowledged and said this was the most attended future host country event ever at the ADB.

The whole place was chock-a-block, it was full. This event, Madam Speaker, actually provided a great opportunity for us to showcase what Fiji would offer next year. We had a short video that was specifically made for this particular event and it is available on *You Tube* too, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in Manila, the Fijian delegations attended a number of official engagements with the ADB Board of Governors, ADB Management, and also had a number of bilateral meetings. The Annual gathering provided valuable opportunity for member countries to discuss key global and regional issues, development challenges and opportunities. It also provided an avenue for discussion of financing options that suited the development priorities and economical financial needs of member countries.

Madam Speaker, as we normally do, the 14th Pacific Development Member Countries (PDMCs) which include Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati and probably the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea and probably Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu held the 28th PDMC Meeting that was chaired by the Governor of the Republic of Kiribati.

In the ADB language, the Minister, whoever is the delegated representative of that country is called the Governor, he is not to be confused with the Governor of the Central Bank.

Madam Speaker, all the members congratulated Fiji for the hosting of the 52nd ADB Annual Meeting next year. The PDMCs also later met with the ADB President mainly to discuss common issues facing the member countries and highlighted the following:

Madam Speaker, whilst appreciating the decision to start a discussion on the increase of base allocation for ADB's specific PDMCs, a request was also made to further increase minimum

allocation consistent with other multilateral development partners like the World Bank. This would benefit our smallest and most vulnerable member countries that access ADB funds or ADF.

The Asian Development Fund Grant funding, Madam Speaker, which is something that Fiji actually does not qualify for, Fiji is a borrower under the Ordinary Capital Resources (OCR) as we are deemed to be a middle income country status. In this regard, Madam Speaker, as raised by Fiji in many other international forums, the PDMCs governors reiterated the need for ADB to look at what we call “Trigger-based mechanisms” where countries can access concessional grant financing the event to address the climatic events as part of its Strategy of 2030.

As highlighted, Madam Speaker, earlier on in Parliament that when we have such an event like *TC Winston*, despite the fact that one-third of the value of our GDP is wiped off, Fiji still cannot get concessional funding because we are deemed to be a middle income country. What we have been pushing for the past two or three years and it appears we will be getting some attraction now is that, even though we do not want the Concessional Funding which we know that we are not entitled to but what we are saying we should be entitled to concessional funding, should there be certain trigger-based mechanism. So, if you, for example, have a cyclone that is very large and damages your GDP up to a certain value or in excess of the percentage of the value, then you should be able to access concessional funding. Otherwise you can have 40 to 50 years of development wiped off in one single climatic event.

Embedding vulnerability and fragility, Madam Speaker, in the multilateral development finance, it is essential for our climate adaptation prudent fiscal management and meeting Sustainable Development Goals.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, given that ADB has the expertise and knowledge-based in the area of public private partnerships, the PDMC requested if ADB could provide the necessary support and advice to roll out capital projects through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). This will not only assist to spread out the overall risk but it will also ease the upfront capital requirement from the public purse.

In addition, Madam Speaker, the private sector can also bring in the much-needed innovation and expertise related to public sector investments. This approach can also be used to enhance private sector participation in climate change adaptation finance initiatives.

Madam Speaker, we also have the opportunity to be again one of the panelists for the Governors’ Seminar on Technological Change, Globalisation and Jobs in Asia. When the ADB speaks again when they mention Asia, it includes the Pacific too. It is hosted and led by the famous BBC Moderator, Zeinab Badawi. The panel consisted of:

- Mr. Takehiko Nakao (the ADB President and Chairperson of the Board of Directors);
- The Honourable Taro Aso (the Deputy Prime Minister and the Governor for Japan);
- The Honourable Sri Mulyani Indrawati (the Governor and Minister for Finance in Indonesia);
- The Philippines Finance Secretary, Mr. Carlos G. Dominguez (which is equivalent to Ministerial position); and
- I represented Fiji as a Governor for Fiji and representing smaller island States.

Madam Speaker, the Seminar gave Fiji the opportunity to express its views on technological advancement and the threats and the opportunities to bring to smaller development member countries. While advanced countries are thinking about new technologies such as robotics and

artificial intelligence, countries like Fiji and other developing countries are still catching up with technological advancement.

We recognise, Madam Speaker, the opportunity that new technology presents to raise productivity, prosperity and inclusive-type of development. But we are also mindful of the need to skill and reskill our people for them to be able to cope with the changing environment.

Of course, Madam Speaker, while technology can replace manpower or human power, it cannot replace the warmth of people to people interaction or the human touch which is very important for tourism and hospitality sector which is actually our strength and indeed our largest foreign exchange earner.

Madam Speaker, the ADB President highlighted that countries need to maintain flexible policies, support improvements to education and put in place a stronger social safety net in order to be well-positioned to take advantage of the changes that new technologies may bring to the region. Again in this respect, Madam Speaker, the PPP that we are engaging in, we have a long-term strategic goal which means by having privileges to medical care facilities available in the Western Division in particular, we are able to open ourselves up to the towns and villages. Indeed we did discuss about the aging population in terms of the likes of Australia and Japan where many of them are looking for opportunities in other countries that have modern-day facilities including medical care, full medical care which Fiji can actually take advantage of and already our people are very good at looking after children and the elderly.

Madam Speaker, this interaction on the panel discussions were also available in the ADB website. Madam Speaker, we also had a number of bilateral meetings to strengthen Fiji's collaboration with other countries. We held meetings with the Japanese International Corporation Agency (JICA), the Senior Vice President, we also met with the ADB President at the Bilateral meeting, we met with the Australian Minister, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, who is responsible for the Pacific, the ADB Executive Director for Fiji's constituency, the ADB Director-General to the Pacific Regional Department, we met the Canadian delegation with respect to some of the bilateral work we are going to do with them, the announcements of that will be made later on.

We also met with the representative of the Nordic countries of the European Investment Bank and they actually had some good news for us in respect of their willingness to fund some of the major infrastructure development projects that we hope to announce in the Budget and again as the Honourable Prime Minister is currently also having meetings on. Many of the bilateral meetings were focused on ongoing bilateral relations and opportunities for further cooperation regarding local partners.

Madam Speaker, further discussions were also held in Fiji's preparations towards the hosting of the ADB Annual Meeting. We also talked about the Nadi River Widening Project, again it is a very big project for us and again we are lining up the finances for that; so the technical aspects are currently being discussed and in fact the Honourable Prime Minister is leading the charge for that in Japan, as we speak, Madam Speaker.

We again, as highlighted in Parliament earlier on, we are working together with the ADB and various other agencies in respect of developing and designing insurance products, financial instruments for better climate adaptation, risk-sharing and also, Madam Speaker, as announced earlier on too, we are looking at the National Health Insurance Scheme which we are currently working on and indeed, we have an expert coming down in about a week or two weeks' time to Fiji for us to be able to formulate something around that.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, ADB remains a genuine development partner for Fiji. It has assisted us through various technical assistance programmes, about financing a number of infrastructure projects. There is a greater responsibility on the Fijian Government and all Fijians as the expectations for the 52nd Annual Meeting is quite high.

Madam Speaker, we are confident that Fiji will take this responsibility with enthusiasm and use this as an opportunity to showcase the determination and ability of Fiji to host such large events. It will also be a great opportunity for our young people because we require numerous volunteers and others to actually host and show our guests in fact at the meeting venue itself. Of course, Madam Speaker, we believe by hosting this event, we will already be putting ourselves into the international market and being hugely beneficial for Fiji.

I would like to also, before I finish, show this official logo that was actually launched in Manila. It has been chosen as the logo for the 52nd ADB Annual Meeting. I can give you all the copies of that and we have had some local designers who would put that together for us. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, let me start by stating on record compared against the total ADB lending and co-financing recently in 2014, ADB assistance to the region, totalled \$22.9 billion, including the co-financing of \$9.2 billion. With these figures, Madam Speaker, it can be assumed that more than 10 percent of a total external debt of the Asia Pacific is owed to the ADB.

Solomon Islands, Madam Speaker, was listed some few years ago to be among the top eight debtors of the ADB. I wonder what Fiji would be given that it became a member in 1970 and the ADB has committed around \$317 million in loan and \$27 million in technical assistance.

Madam Speaker, I would be ignorant if I am not to acknowledge what ADB is doing to assist Fiji over the years. Similarly the latest assistance by the ADB through its Green Climate Funds whereby it has approved a grant of around \$63.4 million for Fiji's Climate Adaptation. That will go towards the planned Fiji Urban Water Supply and Waste Water Management Project. This project by Government, Madam Speaker, will require that Fiji borrows the balance of the cost of \$829 million for the said project from the ADB and other sources.

Madam Speaker, while it is common knowledge that this is a major project, it is likely to benefit our people and it is said to cover a third of Fiji's population and this project is said to be the biggest project Fiji will have undertaken to date, and it will come with the requirements of unprecedented loan for a single project.

It has been interesting relationship, Madam Speaker, with the ADB. In one of its recent country partnership production, ADB has made some interesting revelations about Fiji's intent for Fiji. It has, for example, pointed out that Fiji's unstable political environment needs to be addressed and their vision is to assist Fiji achieve political and economic reforms.

Contrastingly, Madam Speaker, ADB despite the *coups* of 2006, continued implementing projects in the transport and water sectors. In 2009, ADB approved \$49.8 million in additional

financing to complete road and water supply and sewerage investments. The total of \$19.6 million in additional support was provided in 2009 and 2012 in response to devastating floods.

Madam Speaker, ADB reports have acknowledged that the world has been experiencing a period haunted by rising protectionists, regimes and threatened by outright politics and has worked to ensure the Asia Pacific Region would not be affected by such. This statement is interesting, Madam Speaker, given the Bank's decision to look the other way during the period when the international community frowned upon Fiji as it experienced another eight years of non-democratic rule from 2006 to 2014, and its trade relations would therefore have been affected greatly, especially with the neighbouring "big brother" countries.

Madam Speaker, any international meetings hosted by Fiji is always welcomed because it means we have a chance to earn some foreign dollars and expose Fiji further to overseas visitors. In this particular meeting Fiji will continue to solidify its friendship with ADB and other regional countries when it hosts the next AGM for the Bank in Nadi next year.

The ADB's new focus, Madam Speaker, seems to be to join the bandwagon, championing climate change. Yes, we need mitigation and rehabilitation programmes for climate change and yes, we need development assistance but it does not have to come at a cost to our people, Madam Speaker, at a cost of further spiralling into abyss of debt. In fact, I must mention that it has now become widely acknowledged that far from reducing poverty as they often claim, the ADB's version of development in the Asia and Pacific Region has contributed greatly towards the impoverishment of people.

It is well-known that the ADB pays for no penalty for bad decisions on loans or projects. These impacts are disproportionately bond by the very people who the Bank is not responsible to but uses to justify the existence and we all know that these are the vulnerable people. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of National Federation Party or his designate to speak in response.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Acting Prime Minister for his Statement. Madam Speaker, we do appreciate that this international platforms are beneficial for raising Fiji's profile. But at what cost to the taxpayers, Madam Speaker? These high-end meetings for particularly partnerships to seek funds for projects under various initiatives by Fijian Government, it enables it to carry out various reforms to address climatic concerns, mitigation and control measures.

Madam Speaker, we were told yesterday that the CARE assistance package cost taxpayers \$55.29 million, that is very welcome but we are none the wisest legislators on which actual budget allocation this came from, was it from Head 50, which has approximately \$470 million allocated? Is this real money or reliant on FRCS revenue projects that have been realised later.

Madam Speaker, yesterday we were also advised to look at the National Development Plans. Remember that that was launched in Bonn last year as part of Fiji's COP23 Presidency, again this august House was bypassed. The National Development Plan is for both - five years and 20 years. How interesting that such a plan may outlive us all and, guess, the NDP was crafted without any proper baseline statistics, like the 2017 Census. But back to the ADB AGM to be hosted by Fiji next year in May, we welcome that as we would probably be in Government to see that through and I proclaim that rightly in this august House, Madam Speaker, we note that very sleek PR and

almost tourism-like video for Fiji hosting the 52nd ADB meeting produced by some PR campaign heralding that great guy.

The very compelling voice of that video in the deep baritone voice, very interesting narrative, Madam Speaker, but how much did the video cost Fiji? Which allocation would this come from in the Budget? These are very interesting discussions we will see during the next Budget.

Further, tangible outcomes that will benefit all Fijians quite apart from tourism of climate assistance, Madam Speaker, let me say that ADB started with 31 members, it has now grown to 63. Since ADB's framework does not discuss political dimensions of governance, it shows little interest in the fact that its own project and programmes can violate democratic principles. In our view, ADB has allocations under debate and discussions on issues of national interest.

Madam Speaker, once again I state that we will have some very interesting discussions during the Budget session. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. At this point, we will adjourn proceedings for lunch. Please, note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now resume from where we left off and I now call on the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to deliver his statement.

Vulnerability of Young Workers in Workplaces

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament: I rise today to provide insight into the vulnerability of young workers in the workplaces in Fiji, in particular, this is in relation to the theme for this year's World OHS Day which was celebrated last month, and was focused on "Improving the health and safety of young workers".

According to the International Labour Organisation, there are 12 work-related injuries every second, one second gone, 12 work-related injuries already happening around the world and 325 work related deaths each day. Work related illnesses and injuries, illnesses and deaths impose cost on employers, workers in the community and because of this, it is critical for organisations and everyone to make employees safety a priority in Fiji.

Over the past few decades, there has been rapid update of automation, artificial intelligence, and as a result, there have been wide discussion on fears about the transformation of the workplace and the effect on employment as more and more people are replaced by machines, with these has come the fear that people will lose jobs as a result.

The use of these new technologies, however, makes it possible to automate difficult or dangerous tasks, making it safer for those who do those jobs, so workers can then work in safer environments.

Madam Speaker, exposure to substances in the workplace can pose significant health risk to workers. The World Health Organisation reports that air pollution accounts for an estimated 3 million deaths each year. Rapid industrial development in a lot of countries has led to hazardous levels of water and air pollutants.

The Health and Safety at Work Act which my Ministry is responsible for at the Ministry is working to address this through a stronger National Occupational Health and Safety Culture. The development of such a culture is what the Health and Safety Act and its implementation is all about. It is about developing that culture where the right to a safe and healthy working environment is respected at all levels, where the Government employs and works and actively participate in securing a safe and healthy working environment through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties and where the highest priority is accorded to the principle of prevention. A culture of prevention requires that special attention be given to hazardous sectors and vulnerable workers which include the young workers that we have in our country.

Madam Speaker, according to the ILO Report and statistics, there are about 541 million young workers. These are between the ages of 15 to 24 years old, which include 37 million children that are in hazardous child labour. This age group of our young is very vulnerable in the workplace for a number of reasons:

- Physical state of development;
- Psychological state of development - the way they think;
- Attitude towards life;

- Lack of work experience;
- Lack of full appreciation of the dangers of what they face;
- Lack of training;
- Lack of knowledge and skills in the fields that they are facing every day in the workplace;
- Limited awareness of work related hazardous that they face; and
- Lack of bargaining power.

Madam Speaker, because of this, a lot of young workers tend to accept dangerous tasks or jobs with poor working conditions and many of our young seem to always have this gung-ho attitude towards risk and danger with the belief that because they are young they can deal with things; they can lift heavy weights; they can be not so careful in the way they go about the work that they do, not realising that the impact of that will be felt in two or three decades' time when they become older.

The World Day for Safety and Health at Work highlighted the importance of addressing these challenges and improving safety and health for young workers, not only to promote decent youth employment but also to link these efforts to combat hazardous and all other forms of child labour.

We want to promote generation safe and healthy, in other words a new generation of workers that are not only productive but they are also safe and healthy, a generation safe and healthy, and highlight the importance of improving safety and health for young workers and our generations that will follow us.

Last month, my Ministry joined hands with the International Labour Organisation and the tripartite partners to continue advocating and working together to address the vulnerability of young workers in the workplace and to develop measures to curb it, measures to address it to be done by the different tripartite partners and these include the representatives of workers, the representative of employers and also government.

Workshops were conducted in Labasa and Lautoka for more than 350 participants. These participants came from workplaces, tertiary institutions and schools also. Oratory contests were held for young people from tertiary and secondary schools to raise awareness on the vulnerability of young workers in the workplace. The focus of all of these exercises was to get into the minds of the young so that before they come out into the workplace, they are aware of the dangers that they face and they can fine-tune their minds to the importance of this.

The first ever Occupation and Health and Safety Practitioner's Conference was organised by the Fiji National University in partnership with the Ministry and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that was conducted in April last year. It was attended by more than 150 OHS practitioners in Fiji and I believe this is the first time that we have managed to get all the Occupational Health and Safety practitioners together into a national conference to look at the key issues affecting the young workers in the workplace such as manual handling. For example, how do you handle things so that it has no detrimental impact on you when you are old?

Work stress, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), workplace ergonomics, chemicals and dust, all of these were discussed to see how we can try to reduce its impact on our young workers. This National Occupational Health and Safety Conference will now become an annual event to discuss with OHS practitioners and stakeholders what the prevailing challenges are in occupational health and safety that are faced here in Fiji and what are faced at the national level, at the enterprise level. Hopefully as a result, together the parties will be able to develop and come up with suggestions from national level strategies and enterprise level strategies to mitigate the challenges that are faced in the field of Occupational Health and Safety.

We are working together with the support of our tripartite partners, workers and unions and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to collectively help to create a safe and healthy environment for young workers by providing the right tools and training to complete their work safely, educating young workers about workplace health and safety rights and responsibilities, and very importantly empowering young workers to have the confidence to speak about safety and health in the workplace. A lot of times the young may not feel empowered enough to be able to voice their concerns and if they are told to do something that again obviously seen as dangerous and because they are not empowered to voice their concern they will just go ahead and do it even though they know it is dangerous for them.

Madam Speaker, statistics show that 18 years to 24 years old are more likely to have a serious accident at work than older adults. They may be exposed to poor working conditions, leading to the development of occupational illness whilst still young or later in life and being new to the workplace, young people may lack experience and often lack both physical and psychological maturity. They may not take seriously enough the risk that they face, and this is very important for us to address.

In Fiji's context, the global statistics that I have just mentioned above is no different from Fiji. Our statistics recorded at our Ministry show that over 32 percent of reported cases for the past six years, occupational health and safety cases, over 32 percent is for the age group between 20 to 30 years. So, there is one group of only a ten-year span they account for 30 percent of all the occupational health and safety issues coming into our country, but if you just take the age group from 26 to 30 years, this particular age group recorded the highest number of reported cases.

For the past six years, that age gap from 26 years to 30 year, that five year age group they accounted for 17 percent of total cases reported for occupational health and safety and in 2017, this age group (26 to 30 year old), recorded 18 percent out of all the OHS cases. This is for people working from the age of 18 years to 55 to 65 years or some people go right up to 70, vast majority of the cases are for people between the age of 20 years and 30 years and within that bracket of 20 to 30, the majority is from the age group of 26 years to 30 years. This is the area where we have a lot of vulnerability in terms of injuries and illnesses taking place in the workplace.

I have also mentioned the fact that the young tend to be very gung-ho about issues. Recently, we had the issue about asbestos, Honourable Members will recall about the issue of the Civic Centre. Asbestos is not something that kills you today, if you get one of those asbestos, you breathe it in to your lungs, it can lead to cancer in 20 years' time. A lot of young people when they hear about these things, they think it is never going to affect them, but we need to be able to train them and get them to be aware of these things, that if they are not careful about it, it can have a very bad impact on them later on in life.

Other factors that put young people at greater risk include insufficient skills and training, not being aware of their rights and the employers' duties, employer is not recognising their additional protection that young workers need and employers need to be aware of their responsibility to protect the safety and health of workers and they should pay particular attention to young workers. They must carry out a risk assessment before a young person starts work and puts in place measures to protect them.

Young workers should be given appropriate work and provided with adequate training and supervision and the employer should promote a strong, safety concept that involve young workers in safety matters. These issues were discussed at the National Occupational Health and Safety Conference, where we had OHS officers from industry and I am glad that that message will be

taken back and that they will be able to implement programmes within the vicinity of their own organisation to address this issue.

Leadership and work culture plays an important role in understanding and influencing the behaviour of young workers. Everyone who employs a young worker should demonstrate effective leadership in work, health and safety that can possibly influence a worker's values and beliefs, how they perceive risk, motivation, safety knowledge, compliance and participation. Of course, it is valid. If the senior workers and the elder workers are more gung-ho in their attitude and they start taking risk with their own lives, that is sort of attitude will be passed on to the people that work under them. So, I have been stressing very consistently with enterprises that this should be addressed within all employers.

Young people should be given safe and healthy jobs that are within their capabilities and not beyond their capabilities. They require proper training and supervision, they need to be actively engaged if they are to take on board the safety culture of their workplace. It is not enough to simply provide them with a handbook of safety rules, with the necessary encouragement and support and by developing their knowledge, understanding, confidence and competence, young people are far more likely to play their part in managing the risks and possible ill-health associated with their jobs and become tomorrow's health and safety champions.

The good thing that is happening in Fiji today, young workers are learning about the basics of risk-prevention at school and college. If you look at a lot of the curricula that we now have in FNU and in other places, Occupational Health and Safety is being incorporated into their curriculum. This gives a workplace a foundation to build upon and ensures the young people are more receptive to occupational, safety and health in the workplace.

Fiji's statistics on workplace injuries continue to be a concern from my Ministry, with a total of 1,636 injury cases reported in 2017 through our Workers Compensation Service and that is something that we will continue to try to focus on to try to reduce into the future.

The other aspect about vulnerability of young workers, Madam Speaker, that we need to be wary about is their vulnerability in terms of health. So, now, in my Ministry we now have a stronger focus on occupational health and not just on occupational safety, occupational health at the national and enterprise levels, and we are now looking to integrate health promotional activities into the normal OHS Activities, OHS Policy Activities, OHS Training, Promotion and Workplace Audits, and look at these together with Occupational Health.

Now, in our country we know we have the big problem that we face around the South Pacific and in Fiji:

1. Climate change; and
2. The other big *tsunami* which is Non-Communicable Disease (NCDs) have reached an epic proportions, causing around 80 percent of death in our country.

What does that mean? That means 80 percent of us, Members of Parliament, will die from something that we could have avoided - 80 percent of all of us, Honourable Members of Parliament we will die, so 80 percent of all our youths now will die from NCDs, if we do not put a stop to it; the percentage will rise higher and higher.

NCDs are going to have significant impact and Government has put in a lot of policies. We put in the taxation on sugar sweetened beverages in all the policies in the Ministry of Health, but I think, we need to pay a lot of special attention to this. NCDs affect the quantity and the quality of the workforce.

The untimely death of workers, disabilities as a result of stroke and diabetic-related blindness and amputation ultimately results in long-term impacts on the labour supply, national productivity and GDP.

We also wish to highlight that work-related stress, tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, violence, HIV and AIDS, poor physical activity and nutrition, sleep disorder and poor rest represents serious risk for workers. They can be responsible for a greater number of occupational accidents and work-related diseases which lead to injuries, incapacity and death.

Those problems affect a significant proportion of the workforce, including young workers and this has quite an impact on the productivity of enterprises. They have a huge impact on individual's health as well as the health care system and on the enterprise in terms of increased health care cost.

Internationally, the workplace has now become the ideal venue to deal with emerging psychosocial risks so promotion measures must be adopted to address them. Workers spend a large proportion of their time at work. There is also a large potential for influence and change and the support from colleagues can be critical.

For young workers, a certain amount of peer pressure is also a consideration. It is not difficult to understand how poor public health can affect workplaces if we take into account general workers' health and the cost of frequent illnesses or incapacity over the long-term. Some examples that come easily to mind regarding work conditions that affects public health are:

- stress-induced heartaches;
- a culture of overtime in the organisation which has a negative impact on sleep; and
- food availability at work, and I must congratulate Parliament for the lovely food that we are getting now - lots of fruits, salads and vegetables, and I think that it is a good example for the rest of the country.

Madam Speaker, on the positive note, some examples of workplace measures to promote healthy lifestyles are smoking bans at work, have reduced overall smoking, the use of stairs as opposed to lifts on walking or cycling to and from work has become even more common.

Effective workplace health promotion programme should complement OHS measures and should be integrated into the OHS management system of an organisation.

These are new initiatives that my Ministry will aggressively pursue to ensure that enterprises establish and maintain a safe and healthy work environment, enhancing the quality of working life and optimal physical and mental health at work. These will enable workers, especially young workers, to cope more effectively with work-related, personal or family problems that may impact their wellbeing and work performance such as stress, violence or abuse of alcohol and drugs. This will also allow young workers to become proactive in their health care in order to improve their lifestyles and the quality of their diet, sleep and physical fitness. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement on Vulnerability of Young Workers in Workplaces which is an important subject with related matters.

The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: the manner in which the youth vote is being targeted reminds us of the words of the former and legendary Prime Minister, Sir. Winston Churchill, who once remarked, “The youths are easy to deceive because they believe in hope”. I see more of that adage in this statement and to address the substantive issue at stake.

Only yesterday, Madam Speaker, we had some discussions in this House about Child Labour Tackle Project by the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. Given that, it leaves us to wonder whether or not there is any co-relation between that project and this initiative by the Ministry, and it would have been a welcoming statement, Madam Speaker, had the Honourable Minister delved to speak extensively on the same.

The next point, I wish to draw the attention of this House, Madam Speaker, to the question, which young workers are we talking about? It is very easy to come and make statements in this House, Madam Speaker, to raise emotions, hope and hype on what this Government is going to do about the health and safety of young people, when in fact there are no strategies to resolve issues and if the strategies are there, the funds are not there. If the funds are there, there is lack of implementation and if the implementation takes place, monitoring is not there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thirdly, Madam Speaker, OHS issues do not affect only one age group but all age groups if a workplace is not complied to OHS standards. That brings into consideration the need to police the issue of compliance in workplaces and I think everyone agrees, not all our workplaces are OHS compliant because we have been too complacent to pursue that, and this has led to a number of injuries, fatalities and workplace accidents and disasters. As if that is not enough, Madam Speaker, the codified laws had made it more difficult for our lawyers to invoke common law to sue for appropriate compensation.

Madam Speaker, there are some very basic elements involved in relation to the vulnerability of young workers as far as OHS issues are concerned. Firstly, inclusion of young men and women in OHS Committees or getting them appointed as OHS representatives in a workplace to articulate the interests and aspirations as well as the grudges and grievances of their co-young workers.

Secondly, there is lack of youth participation in decision-making and neglect of youth leadership, that should not be tolerated. We must learn to value our youths and groom them well, to secure themselves and our young economy as its human resources.

Thirdly, our young workers, Madam Speaker, need advice and proper training and the Ministry must ensure that this is done and monitored.

Fourthly, Madam Speaker, the law and regulation with regard to supply and wearing of Personal Protective Gears (PPEs) is a pressing issue. In some workplaces, young workers are exploited by way of not being given the PPEs. In other cases, there are some people who refuse to wear the PPEs and end up with OHS issues.

So, the point I want to emphasise here is the need to have a culture of OHS in workplaces to avert situations of incidents and disasters. The Ministry of Labour, Madam Speaker, has failed miserably in this regard because they need more resources to do this voluminous task.

Madam Speaker, many of our young workers are not well aware of the institutional and structural setup of the workplace and its state, and after getting injured or thrown to unhealthy

situations, do not complain or even if they do after becoming aware, it is too late for them to do something about it. That again happens because of the lack of OHS culture in workplaces and the sad part of the entire episode is the time taken by the Ministry of Labour to process OHS cases, which again boils down to lack of resources.

There are several other issues involved in relation to this matter, Madam Speaker, but due to time constraints, I reserve to talk about some grey areas later on if I do get an opportunity.

Madam Speaker, in summing up my response, I humbly plead with the Government of the day to stop vote bank politics which are a well-known trait of left wing dictatorships and develop the necessary will to address the problems of our young workers.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- We cannot afford to have a weak and injured workforce. It is them who will carry the heavy burden and other problems that have been created in the last one decade, into the future, and resolve the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the designated Leader of the NFP to speak in response.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement.

Madam Speaker, I believe this is another very energetic Minister that we marvel at in terms of OHS updates to this august House. I remember earlier this month that the Honourable Minister officiated an OHS workshop, where he said that the estimated numbers of all OHS related issues do not properly reflect the magnitude of the problem or the real impact of occupational accidents and diseases on workers, families, communities and the economy.

Madam Speaker, he also talked about automation. Automation is coming in slowly, however, there are still various companies and organisations that continue with manual labour, and it is very, very important for us to be very mindful of the safety of the young people and all the people at large.

Safety at work is of paramount importance. Another very important thing is this, Madam Speaker, that reconstruction is very hard, new construction is easier. When workers start at workplaces and businesses pay a levy of 1 percent on their total wages to the FNU now (before it used to be called TPAF) and I believe FNU is not all that strong in doing all these trainings and teaching. It is very important that they pull up their socks and start training young people so that when they start their work, they know what to do.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Where is the evidence?

HON. P. CHAND.- We have the evidence, I do not have to provide you with that.

(Laughter)

HON. P. CHAND.-We go to places, we see, and this is what is happening. I am also a businessman and I do face this serious problem with FNU and that is the evidence. He was the Minister, he was unable to do much about that.

(Laughter)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, in 2017, the Honourable Minister stated in the media that from 2012 to 2016, the most reports of work-related incidents were in the area of injuries at work with a total of 5,674 cases. Of those, there were 119 reported cases of OHS diseases and 30 workplace related deaths.

In relation to the vulnerability of young workers and the Honourable Minister's update on the matter today, we hope that the Honourable Minister can urge his peer, the Honourable Minister for Defence to update this august House on the investigations of the ill-fated Cessna172 training aircraft that very much involved two young prospective workers in training.

Madam Speaker, also with your indulgence, allow me on the same theme of the Ministerial Statement on the vulnerabilities of young workers to lay bare in this august House an incident that happened to two of our youth volunteers just this morning, just outside of the Parliament precincts.

An Honourable Member of this House from the Government side, Madam Speaker, threatened them because the Member was upset about the social media stories about him. The incident was witnessed by another young staff from SODELPA, from the balcony. This is unbecoming of a Member of Parliament and a legislator, someone who shuts people up in Committees and then later on tries to threaten them. This is not on, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the point is that the Honourable Minister will need to assess OHS right here in Parliament and the vulnerabilities of our next generation of leaders who are intimidated very aggressively by elected representatives who should know better.

Madam Speaker, the youths are our future leaders and we need to encourage them; we need to help them, we need to strengthen them; because when we do not do that, they will not be able to connect, cooperate and communicate in the right things and that is something very important. I know that the Government side can laugh as much as they can because they have the vast majority; I do not care about that.

Madam Speaker, we will be seeking urgent redress from your high office on this, Madam Speaker, and the Police, and urge the Honourable Minister to assess his side of the House before he can claim to protect young workers of Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Acting Prime Minister to deliver his second Statement.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to provide an update on the newly constructed Vatuwaqa funeral rites facility at Toa Street which was officially opened on Saturday last week. This is a milestone in our work, Madam Speaker, to build a more inclusive, tolerant, respectful and indeed a united Fiji.

Madam Speaker, under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, the FijiFirst Government is the very first Government to have delivered such a facility, although the idea, Madam Speaker, had been raised and debated in Parliament since as early as 1992, almost 26 years ago.

Madam Speaker, a former National Federation Party Member who actually happens to be related to me, in his maiden speech on 13th July, 1992, raised the issue on the need for a proper 'ghat', or a facility for *Hindu* religious ceremonies and funeral rites. And I quote, Madam Speaker,

from that debate, from the *Hansard* copy of the debate that I have got here with me. He said, and I quote:

“Whilst we have had burial grounds in crematoriums provided to various faiths, there are no earmarked ‘ghats’ for religious offerings for the Hindu faith.”

Again, Madam Speaker, during the debate on the 1993 Appropriation Bill on 19th November 1992, in his contribution to the Budget, the same Member or former Member of the NFP reiterated the need for a proper, and I quote:

“... location so that respectable, cultural and religious offerings could be made.”

But without any progress for six years since the idea, Madam Speaker, was first mooted, again in 1998, the same NFP Member moved a motion and the motion read, Madam Speaker, “the need for Government to provide a *ghat* or a pier for Hindu religious ceremonies in waters of the sea or rives in different centres of Fiji.”

Madam Speaker, I would like to quote actually what was said within that debate and the Honourable Member said:

“It may look a bit odd for me as a follower of the Islamic faith to express interest in a matter which only concerns believers of Hindu faith, but I choose to speak on the subject because of my respect and appreciation of all religions and cultures. In early 1992,” (I am quoting for him) “the Hindus were publicly accused of polluting or littering the rivers and sea for disposing of their offerings and flowers, et cetera, there. In fact that was the point which gave birth to my real concern in the matter. I was not a member of this House then but an ordinary citizen of this country. The people of the Hindu faith were, however, relieved from the Crown Law Office in those days, subsequently issued a statement clarifying that these offerings were clean in spirit and their contents and it does not constitute littering.”

Madam Speaker, a couple of other quotes:

“After asking for special sites for Hindu death rites is not unreasonable. The public funds are already being used for graveyards, the non-Hindus of this country will undoubtedly show their concern and sympathy to their fellow citizens. Hindus have chosen to keep silent on this issue until then. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request the Government to recognise this cultural aspect of Hindu religion and complement the effort and the initiative of the Suva City Council in the provision of *ghat* in the city of Suva, and also consider the establishment of such *ghats* in other parts of the country so that Hindus can practise their religion in a dignified manner in a respectable place that it deserves.”

And then, Madam Speaker, the motion was referred to the Prime Minister’s Office to find out under which Act it could be dealt with, Madam Speaker. The Prime Minister then, of course, was the current leader of SODELPA then and is the current leader now sorry. Madam Speaker, so despite being deliberated at the highest level in Parliament, nothing was done by the then Rabuka Government or the Chaudhry Government or neither the Qarase Government.

But, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has delivered this under the decisive leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister. Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Members would remember there is actually a budgetary allocation in this budget that was delivered last year in the 2017-2018 Budget, Madam Speaker. The irony, of course, Madam Speaker, is that while this

project was initially the brain child of NFP back in those days, the current NFP leader rather than saying anything positive about the rites and the facility rites in the letters to the Editor in the *Fiji Sun* on Monday this week 14th of May, talking about the possibilities of NFP, SODELPA Coalition. Nothing positive to say about the rites facility, Madam Speaker, but yet he talks about bipartisanship in the same breath. All he did was attack the statement that was made at the opening of the funeral rites facility.

Madam Speaker, the Vatuwaqa Funeral Rites Facility is not only a first for Fiji but which may well be the first in the world specifically for this purpose, a project that ensures our Hindu brothers and sisters who will take their final journey after death in dignity, in a clean, functional and appropriate space for their friends and loved ones to pay their final respects. The passing of a friend or loved one is a difficult time, Madam Speaker, and that time should not be made more difficult by the hassle, the inconvenience of having to go to great lengths to perform funeral rites and seek the safety and privacy that every grieving family deserves.

Madam Speaker, of course, as highlighted earlier on, people of the Christian and Islamic faith actually have a grave. They bury people and that is when the rites are completed, then they can go up to church or wherever they go and pray, Madam Speaker. However, for the Hindu brothers and sisters, once they cremate, there are other rituals that need to be followed and this is precisely what the *ghats* are for.

Madam Speaker, we hope that this facility would put an end to the unnecessary struggle many families underwent to put their loved ones to rest with dignity, and we hope to see more of these facilities throughout Fiji, Madam Speaker, very soon as has been announced.

The funeral rites facility in Vatuwaqa, Madam Speaker, has been under construction for the last ten months and preparations included numerous consultations with religious groups, to ensure that the physical aspects of this facility are in line with Hindu practices and beliefs.

Madam Speaker, the Vatuwaqa Funeral Rites Facility has been completed at a total cost of \$919,186.31, undertaken by Permal Construction Limited. The facility includes amenities such as parking area, cooking facilities, a space where rites can be performed, a walkway and a small jetty which is more than 20 metres in length for the '*asthi visarjan*' rituals and sanitation facilities which also include showers. This Funeral Facility provides everything needed for funeral rites, which until today has taken place on a piecemeal basis at different locations with little to no privacy and other inconveniences.

Madam Speaker, even at funeral facilities in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, United States of America and others do accommodate Hindu rites but aspects such as the disposal of ash into the sea, performing final rites within the facility and cooking facilities are not available in these facilities.

Madam Speaker, these all-in-one funeral facility will provide for all aspects of Hindu funeral rituals and on behalf of the Honourable Prime Minister, I would like to express our pride in being able to make this facility a reality for our Hindu community.

Madam Speaker, this Facility does not belong to the State. It belongs to the Hindus in Fiji who have long needed a safe and an uninterrupted location to see off their loved ones when they have passed on.

Madam Speaker, the Facility was handed over to the Vatuwaqa Funeral Rites Committee to manage and maintain the daily operations of the facility. It is for the first time ever in history that

nine Hindu religious bodies have come together to form this Committee, you could colloquially say that these are the nine different denominations, if you like. These religious bodies are:

1. Then India Sanmarga Ikyo Sangam (TISI);
2. Shree Sanatan Dharam Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji;
3. Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee;
4. Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji;
5. Gujarati Samaj;
6. Kabir Sat Dharam Pracharak Maha Sabha Fiji;
7. Shree Sanatan Dharam Purohit Brahma Maha Sabha Fiji; and
8. Gandharva Sangeetalaya; and the
9. Fiji Sevashram Sangha.

Madam Speaker, the Committee has already had its first inaugural meeting which included the Ministry of Economy, Office of the Solicitor-General and the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Local Government. At the meeting, Madam Speaker, the Committee elected its first office bearers for the first term. Of course, the Presidency for the Committee shall hold the office for one term and the role shall be rotated amongst the nine religious bodies. We would like to say, Madam Speaker, that Government has actually had a role in facilitating the first ever collaboration between these nine different Hindu organisations.

I also would like to say that, Madam Speaker, at the handover ceremony on Saturday, all the religious organisations signed the agreement with the State to take over the responsibility from managing the site. The Acting Director of Lands as the licensor acted on behalf of the State and for those who may want to know, this land is in fact the land that used to be part of the old quarantine site which is next to the Vatuwaqa cemetery; it is a small piece of land that has been chalked out.

Madam Speaker, we have also told the Committee that all the facilities must be provided free of charge for anyone that wants to use this particular Facility. The Committee will run the site at their own cost on a day to day basis.

Madam Speaker, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all others who have contributed towards the construction of the facility in some way, especially the contractor, the Ministry of Agriculture for providing the land to build this facility; Pro Design for providing the signboard; R.C. Manubhai for providing the plaque; Energy Fiji Limited and Water Authority of Fiji for installing power and water meters at no cost to the Facility.

Madam Speaker as highlighted, the Fijian Government is planning to build two more funeral rites facilities; one in Nausori and the other in Lautoka. We are also looking at Labasa subsequent to that, and even Nadi. I have already received phone calls from a Pundit from Sigatoka saying that they are interested, not necessarily perhaps the same elaborate manner in which we build this Facility but something that is conducive to ensuring that they carry out the rites in a dignified manner, Madam Speaker. We will, of course, be working with the different religious organisations and any of the landowners whether State, *iTaukei* or freehold, to be able to allocate for this Facility.

Madam Speaker, in that respect, I would like to thank everyone for this particular Facility, just for the information of Parliament, we have also met with the Committee in Raralevu in Nausori. They have got a very good committee that runs the grave there and also the graveyard sites, and also the crematorium and Government is looking at providing them with gas furnaces for the cremation. As we know, Madam Speaker, for cremation purposes, many of the people, in particular, live in the central division use mangroves or *dogo* for the cremation.

But in the Western Division, they use the larger rain tree timber, so also in our efforts to ensure that we preserve our mangrove sites that we do not give people the enticement to go and actually illegally cut *dogo*, create the demand for the resource owners to actually cut the *dogo* so you can get some money. So, if we are able to then ensure that we provide furnaces, there will be, of course, less pressure or less demand to use this *dogo* for this particular purpose, Madam Speaker.

So, we are currently working with them, we have got the Construction and Implementation Unit (CIU) team working with them to see how they can fix up the site and provide these furnaces, and we are looking at replicating similarly in other sites within Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to offer our response to the Statement made by the Acting Prime Minister regarding the Funeral Rites Facility that has just been opened at the Vatuwaqa Cemetery.

On the outset, Madam Speaker, this initiative by the FijiFirst Government is to be commended because that is something that, we, on this side of the House fully agree with and fully concur with that we need to not only observe but ensure that our loved ones are given the proper burial or funeral rites, no matter what belief or faith that they belong to.

But again as indicated, we commend the Government for taking this initiative. When I say “initiative”, Madam Speaker, the cemetery has been there for quite some time. Cremation of our friends and loved ones have been part and parcel of our daily lives here in Fiji, all throughout the years, but the provision of certain rites to be accorded to some, that was a touchy issue then, but now given the way we all come together and the way we all live together, this initiative needs to be commended here. But again, Madam, Speaker, in saying this, one must not forget that all these years, especially for this cemetery in Vatuwaqa, began in 1925.

So, it has been there for quite some time but the building of a special area for funeral rites has just been done quite lately as for this one here. That again, Madam Speaker, one must not forget as to how the people of Fiji have all along been taking care of how they offer these funeral rites to our people who have passed on.

Again, Madam Speaker, even though this may belong specifically to the *Hindu* faith and I take it from the Honourable Prime Minister the facility is open to other faiths as well, and that is a good gesture. At the same time one must not forget that the culture that we live in now and the traditions have slowly evolved as well, and even *Christians* are selecting this as a way to go. Some of my relatives’ bodies were taken to Nasinu Crematorium quite late, but again, Madam Speaker, the cost is a factor to be considered here.

Even though the Honourable Prime Minister has mentioned the usage of mangroves for the fire, but again it was put to a stop by this Government. The scattering or the emersion of the ashes along the waterfront in Suva, that used to be freely done in the past, it was stopped by none other but this Government as well. Maybe the new Honourable Minister for Environment could share a few ideas as to why they stopped this and all of a sudden, they opened it again. They allowed it to continue again again, Madam Speaker, what this side of the House wishes to raise is, we would like to commend the Government for this, but again we need to consider it and a wider aspect as to how best we can cater for other ethnic groups and other faith-based organisations as well. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Acting Prime Minister for his statement. A funeral rites facility or a *ghat* was long overdue. In fact such facilities should be built in all districts so that our communities who cremate their loved ones can perform their funeral rites and prayers with dignity.

We are hopeful, Madam Speaker, that the Vatuwaqa Funeral Rites Committee that has been tasked with looking after the facility will do so to preserve the cleanliness of the facility and maintenance of the environment and surroundings. It is good to see all Hindu religious and cultural organisations come together in unity to look after this project.

Madam Speaker, it was the NFP through the then Member of Parliament, Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum who by the way was the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee for seven years (between 1992 to 1999 first mooted the idea of a *ghat* or Hindu prayers in his Maiden Speech on 13th July, 1992, and again during his Budget Address on 18th November, 1992.

Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum moved an adjournment motion in Parliament on 4th December, 1998 and I was part of it, and reiterated his 1992 statement that he was pleased that the Crown Law Office had clarified that offerings of religious nature, but the Hindu community, into the rivers and the sea were “not litter but clean offerings”. He said:

“A *ghat* should not be used only for funeral rites but offerings from other Hindu religious events and prayers as well as weddings”.

The motion was agreed to unanimously by the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), National Federation Party (NFP) and Fiji Labour Party (FLP) and referred to the Office of the Prime Minister to see under which Act it could be dealt with.

However, Madam Speaker, four months later on 25th March, 1999, Parliament was dissolved for the May, 1999 Elections and both SVT and NFP lost, so nothing could be done by us, we were not there. But we are pleased that after almost 12 years in power, this Government has initiated and completed the project.

Madam Speaker, we do agree with the Honourable Acting Prime Minister that religion should be a unifying force.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Indeed, Madam Speaker, mostly throughout our history, all our major communities have peacefully coexisted, except for those brief periods of political turmoil on four occasions between 1987 and 2006.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- During these times, Madam Speaker, racial and religious intolerance raised its ugly head as seen after the 1987 and 2000 *Coups*. After the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution on 10th April, 2009, following the 2006 *Coup*, Madam Speaker, the Public Emergency Regulations were imposed, permits were needed for any Hindu religious event.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, there was an instruction from the controlling authority of Hindu Religious Organisation that only registered Ramayan Mandalis were to be granted permits to hold weekly prayers, so after every political upheaval, we have had brief prayers seeking peace instead of religious intolerance and impositions

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- ... but by far and large, we have peacefully co-existed in our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- And as it befits this occasion, I wish our Muslim community and followers of Islam a blessed start to the Holy Month of *Ramadhan*.

((Honourable Members interject))

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, while opening the facility last Saturday, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister turned the occasion into a political one by saying, “While NFP mooted the idea of building such a facility in the 1990s, the Government did not do anything about it and it was a possibility that the NFP was likely to form a Coalition with the party led by the same person who was the leader then.”

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.-Madam Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. These are wild and unsubstantiated allegations against the NFP and is yet another clear signal of this Government going berserk in a bid to remain in power.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, we have repeatedly stated publicly that we were not in a coalition with any party in 2014, and we are not in a coalition with any other party, and fighting the 2018 General Elections on our own.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, we are solely focussed on fighting the 2018 Elections. This is not the first time the Attorney-General has made such a statement. We have evidence of him saying the same thing in Vunivutu in Vanua Levu in March, where he said, “NFP, on its own, will never have majority seats and we are hoping to form a coalition with SODELPA”. He urged the voters of Vunivutu to protect this from happening.

Madam Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister and his minions should stop this fear-mongering and intimidation by spreading lies about the NFP’s policies instead of uttering a litany of lies, they should start advocating policies, benefitting all the people of Fiji as well as the governance, transparency and accountability. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I was not able to hear your last two paragraphs. I give you the opportunity to repeat those two paragraphs, please? And allow everyone to hear him out.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and his minions should stop this fear-mongering and intimidation by spreading lies about NFP policies. Instead of uttering a litany of lies they should start advocating policies benefitting all the people of Fiji as well as good governance, transparency and accountability.

(Chorus of Interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, next item on the Order Paper, Consideration of Bills.

I have been informed that there are no Bills for consideration today.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

AGREEMENT ON PORT SAFETY MEASURES AND WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION PROTOCOL - REVIEW OF

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence:

- i) review the Agreement on the Ports Safety Measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal unreported and unregulated fishing; and
- ii) review the following Treaty - World Health Organisation Protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- The Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the Treaties to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

I confirm that the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaties and written analysis as provided by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3) the Treaties and Analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 34 is suspended so as to allow the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion under Standing Order 130.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, as presented by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, this morning, we had two Treaties:

- i) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and
- ii) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

Madam Speaker, of course, under Standing Order 130, I believe that the Honourable Attorney-General has already given notice of the motion on these two Treaties, as consistent with Section 51 of the Constitution, where Parliament has the authority to authorise such Treaties where they become binding to the State, so that basically is the reason behind the suspension motion, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament is open for debate and I invite input, if any. There being none, the Leader of the Parliament would you like to say anything further?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I have nothing further, Madam Speaker, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 34 is suspended so as to allow the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion under Standing Order 130. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

I now call upon the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney General to move his motion.

**RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS -
CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
RIGHTS (ICCPR AND ICESCR)**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament approves that Fiji ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite the Acting Prime Minister to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence earlier this morning tabled the Report on the Ratification of the United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This Report, Madam Speaker, tabled by the Standing Committee provides the summary and examination submissions made to the Standing Committee in which there was an overwhelming support for Fiji to ratify ICCPR and ICESCR.

In fact, 100 percent of the submissions received by the Standing Committee called for the ratification of the two Treaties. With the ratification of the Convention against Torture (CAT), and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) by this Government through this Parliament, we have ratified a total of five out of the nine core Human Rights Instruments and we are committed to the ratification of all the Human Rights Instruments by 2020, which is in less than two years' time.

It is clear, Madam Speaker, that Fiji is fast-tracked towards the ratification of all the nine conventions and, of course, Madam Speaker, we are fast-tracked for one reason, the foundation of a comprehensive and wide-reaching human rights protections that are enshrined in our Constitution, which is very important for us. Madam Speaker, the Fijian Constitution has unprecedented number of rights that has never been included in any of other Fijian Constitutions, including rights, not just in civil and political rights but also socio-economic rights.

And, of course, Madam Speaker, as we know now that under this Constitution, these rights are also now applicable as they say, "not just only vertically, but also horizontally", in other words, it is applicable also in the private sector. Madam Speaker, just very quickly, the ICCPR, just to refreshen the memories, is a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16th December, 1966 which came into force on 23rd March, 1976.

The ICCPR, Madam Speaker, commits State Parties to respect the Civil and Political Rights of individuals, including the right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, electoral rights and rights to due process and a fair trial. The ICCPR was drafted in 1966 alongside with the International Convention on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is the other rights that we are seeking, Madam Speaker, to have ratified or Parliament to agree for us to ratify.

Madam Speaker, it is monitored by the United Nations Human Rights Committee which is a separate body to the United Nations Human Rights Council which reviews whether reports of State Parties, on how rights and other conventions are being implemented, State Parties must report initially one year after acceding to the ICCPR and then every four years unless the Committee requests in additional reports.

So as we do, for example, with CEDAW as we do with CERD, once these two Conventions are ratified, we actually have to report to the Committee and there will be reports done on the country and, of course, it gives individuals and non-governmental organisations to also make submissions.

Madam Speaker, it is prudent to note that in 2010 that the Fijian Government in its Universal Periodic Review Report made a commitment towards ratifying all core Human Rights Instruments within 10 years. Madam Speaker, of course, as I mentioned, that we have ratified UNCAT and we are looking at establishing our ratification provisions in respect of all the other conventions.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of issues that have some public comments that have been made by the Opposition Members, I think in particular outside this Parliament. For example,

Honourable Prasad, who unfortunately is not here, think that Fiji is not in compliance with Article 25 of the ICCPR. Perhaps, he does not understand Article 25 and that is why perhaps the politician have got the interpretation of Article 25 completely wrong.

Article 25 of the ICCPR deals with the right to electoral and political participation, however, this right is not an absolute right. Article 25 states:

“Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in Article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions.”

This means that any restrictions to the rights under Article 25 must be reasonable which is the standard test, Madam Speaker is. There is no such thing as “unfettered freedom”. All freedom comes with justifiable limitations.

Section 23(4) of the Fiji Constitution, Madam Speaker, authorised that “A law may limit a person right to form or join a political party, participate in activities of or recruit members to form a political party and campaign for political party candidate,” of course.

The limitation, Madam Speaker, placed on public officers, for example, Trade Unionist under section 14 of the Political Parties Act are in line with the provision of the Fijian Constitution. The limitations are reasonable and proportionate to Fiji’s aim of maintaining neutrality of all public officers, including those of trade unions.

Madam Speaker, this Act also requires political parties to disclose sources of funds for political party and indeed, an independent candidate which in no way inhibits a person’s right to political participation under ICCPR, Madam Speaker. We have already had a number of cases that have been adjudicated in the Fijian Courts in relation to the interpretation of various sections of the Act which have not necessarily been in favour of NFP, perhaps that is why they have got this jaded interpretation.

Madam Speaker, apart from that, which we can, of course, discuss in our debate, there are various provisions that are in the Fijian Constitution that are in alignment with the ICCPR. We believe also the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Madam Speaker, are important convention for us to be able to ratify and it is in alignment with also the Socio-Economic Rights that have been, in fact, set out under the Fijian Constitution, Madam Speaker.

So with those introductory remarks, Madam Speaker, I would like to wind up and perhaps open the floor for any contribution that Honourable Members may have, but I think this will be a step in the right direction. I hope all the Honourable Members can actually support the ratification by the Fijian Government of these two conventions. The moment that Parliament approves this, we can then lodge the instruments for ratification through our office in New York and Fiji again will, of course, then would have achieved more of a success in terms of meeting its objective of meeting all the nine core International Human Rights Convention. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament is open to any Member that may want to speak on the motion. Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Madam Speaker, it is prudent to note that in 2010, the Fijian Government in its Universal Periodic Review Report made a commitment towards ratifying all core Human Rights Instruments within 10 years.

At the last reporting cycle of 2014 in Geneva, before the Human Rights Council, the Fijian Government reaffirmed its commitment to ratifying all core Human Rights Instruments which the ICESCR and ICCPR is part of. Madam Speaker, the ICESCR defines a broad set of rights related to the Economic, Social and Cultural elements of life that States must provide to their citizens. Specific Rights relate to:

- the right to work;
- the right to social security;
- the right to adequate standards of living, that is food, shelter and clothing;
- freedom from hunger; and
- the right to health and education.

Madam Speaker, ICESCR also provides for the right to take part in cultural life and the right to enjoy benefits from science and invention. Both the Covenants, the ICESCR and the ICCPR, guarantee that the exercise of the human rights enunciated in the Treaties shall be without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or any other status.

The Covenant recognises that all people have the right to self-determination by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural developments.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of Fiji, Chapter 2, is the Bill of Rights which recognises many of the Rights provided in these two Covenants. Even though the State may realise the ICESCR progressively, they must also take immediate action, irrespective of resources, in the five following areas:

1. The elimination of discrimination - discrimination must be prohibited in, for instance, health care, education and workplace immediately.
2. Economic, social and cultural rights that are not subject to progressive realisation; for example the right to form and join trade unions and the right to strike; the obligation to protect children from economic and social exploitation.
3. Obligation to take steps - while full realisation of ICESCR may be achieved progressively, steps towards that goal should be taken within a reasonably short time. Such steps should be deliberate, concrete and targeted, using appropriate means; including particularly but not only the adoption of legislative measures.
4. Non-retrogressive measures - State should not allow the existing protection of ICESCR to deteriorate unless there is a strong justification. For example, introducing school fees in secondary school which had normally free of charge.
5. Minimum core obligations contents of the Rights under ICESCR, there are obligations considered to be immediate effect to meet the minimum essential level of each of the Rights; for example, primary education which is free, compulsory and universal is minimum core content of the right to education, minimum essential food which is nutritionally adequate and safe to ensure freedom from hunger in relation to the right to adequate food, and essential drugs in relation to the rights to health.

Madam Speaker, some of the challenging issues raised by the submitters during the consultation sessions; some possible implication of ICESCR for education in Fiji, probably with the

Pacific Island countries as well, especially cultural rights in relation to language, culture and artistic production, participation of cultural life, cultural heritage, cultural diversity, for example, education:

1. Language policies, allowing children to learn their mother tongue, especially at ECE and primary school level.
2. Offering opportunities for students to study their own language and culture in high school and tertiary institutions in other parts of the developed world.
3. Ensuring cultural democracy in the curriculum of formal education from ECE to University level, including cultural literacy as an outcome of primary education.
4. Ensuring that people and communities have access to resource necessary for participation in culture of their choice.
5. Valuing, promoting and protecting cultural artistic production.
6. Developing cultural indicators of human development, requiring audit of all educational institutions and cultural competence as criterion for teachers from ECE to University.

Madam Speaker, ratification of ICESCR is important, especially to our young people as it deals among other things with education, not only in regards to their right to education, but cultural rights as well which include the right to learn in their own cultural language as well as to learn about their cultures, its history, knowledge and value system and how this can help them live sustainable lives in the spirit of equality, human dignity and non-discrimination.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank all those who have submitted and raised many important issues to help the Committee to compile the Report.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, we support the move to ratify this International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Right (ICESCR). I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Howard Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker; the Acting Honourable Prime Minister; Honourable Leader of the Opposition; Honourable Ministers; and Members of Parliament: I rise to address this House on two important United Nations Rights Covenants that the Government is to ratify and to provide the background to these important agreements and the pathway to ratification.

In 2010, the United Nations held a Conference in Geneva which was attended by all member countries of the UN. The purpose of the meeting was to announce two different, but related Covenants on Human Rights that were designed to form the basis of human rights legislation in every UN Member country.

At that meeting, the Fiji Government committed to working to implement the Covenants in Fiji and to review all the legislations currently used in Fiji that may be relevant to the Covenants, both in the spirit and in the legal definitions of the Covenants, to ensure that there was no conflict between the International Covenants and the Domestic Laws and Decrees.

The most significant of the domestic legislation was the Fiji Constitution which our Government had started to review with an objective of making the then current Constitution more relevant to the demands of the nation and to incorporate an updated Bill of Rights, as well as clarifying other issues that did not meet current standards of governance.

At the Conference, it was agreed that the best way to ensure that the two Covenants worked well with the domestic legislation currently in use, was to review all laws from the bottom up and adjust the domestic legislation where necessary, to bring it into line with the Covenants. Fortunately, the review of the Fijian Constitution would also require the bottom up approach and the introduction of a number of new Acts and the release of the two Covenants was very timely.

Madam Speaker, the two United Nations' Covenants focused solely on rights and are as follows:

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which focuses on the rights related to the governance of the country and the individual rights within that area and;
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights or ICESCR. This Covenant deals with the rights of individuals in their relationship citizens and other entities and with government of the Member State.

There was a need to confirm and if necessary change the existing legislation to meet the requirements of integrating the International Covenants and domestic legislation to ensure a smooth transition. Every Member State will attend a Universal Periodic Review (UPR) with the UN every four years until they ratify or until the 2020 deadline. The review period has a maximum of ten years and the ratification on the Covenant is required by 2020, but a member State can ratify the Covenant as soon as they believe that the international and domestic legislation is compatible.

Early ratification is desirable as it immediately gains all the benefits. There are a number of member states that have already ratified, including in our region Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Palau. Because of the huge impact of the two Covenants will have a marked effect on the legal framework of Fiji and because of the Government needs to understand what that impact will be and be assured that the results achieved by ratification of the Covenants will bring meaningful benefit to the population of Fiji and provide improved governance. There has been a great deal on oversight in the process towards ratification.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence spent a significant amount of time in the assessment process and has sought expert advice and submissions from a wide spread of relevant specialist stakeholders in the rights area and Government Departments to ensure that the widest possible consultations have need undertaken and no issues have been overlooked.

In the process, requests were made to a number of relevant parties to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence covering issues on the Covenants and in a number of instances, the submission requests were made with a set of questions that the Committee felt that they needed expert opinion on. These submissions were made by the Director of Public Prosecution, His Lordship the Chief Justice, iTaukei Affairs Board, USP Academics involved in the rights area, Opposition Parliamentary Parties and Youth Wings and some Fijian citizens.

What are the benefits of ratifying the Covenants, Madam Speaker? Ratification would indicate that Fiji accepts international norms and legal best practices and underlines its status as a nation committed to the rule of law and respect for human rights. The voice and authority with which Fiji presents its views on myriad legal political and diplomatic issues will be fortified in the

various forums when we speak as a State that has formally committed itself to these two International Covenants.

There is evidence to suggest that inward investment into Fiji and its attractiveness as a place to do business will be enhanced by its voluntary commitment to those fundamental human rights Covenants. As Fiji moves forward and continues to develop, the values, safeguards and other protections of the Covenants may provide a further strengthening of the foundation of the country for the next phases of development.

Ratifying the Covenants will also allow Fiji to stand for membership of the United Nations Human Rights Committee and increase the diplomatic standing and strength of Fiji in the world diplomatic arena.

Fiji has adequate redress mechanisms to deal with complaints that an individual's human rights have been breached either through the Constitution redress provisions of the 2013 Constitution or the Commission for Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination. Fiji has adequate institutions and laws in place to deal with the complaints that Fiji is not fulfilling its obligations under the Covenants and other Human Rights Laws. There are currently a number of matters before Fiji courts that are dealing with human rights law claims.

Section 7 of the 2013 Fijian Constitution allows relevant international rights to be used to interpret the rights and freedoms protected in Fiji's Bill of Rights. A number of international decisions concerning the interpretation and application of human rights have already been used in Fiji by the courts. The ratification of the two Covenants will allow a greater depth of jurisprudence to be utilised in the Courts of Fiji on matters of human rights.

Countries will sign up to the Covenant but it is important to note that after the ratification process, States undertake certain responsibilities. The ratification of the Covenants will constitute a yardstick by which Fiji's commitment will be measured and will enhance Fiji's standing with the rest of the world.

The requirement within each of the Covenants will involve the holding of regional meetings and technical meetings for study and consultation and will provide a number of platforms for the exchange of information and reports of experience that will help significantly in strengthening Fiji's jurisprudence and the practices of people on the ground dealing with human rights issues. The ratification requires comprehensive reporting and that requires wide internal communication for the State and that the consulting process increases awareness and the quality of compliance on the human rights process.

Madam Speaker, it is also important at this point for me to reiterate that Fiji's 2013 Constitution already has all the necessary laws to meet the requirements of the Covenants and I acknowledge that the introduction to the Covenants in 2010 was of great assistance in the drafting of the 2013 Constitution. In fact, some of the human rights in the Fiji Bill of Rights are word for word as the same as the Covenants. The 2013 Constitution and the legislation flowing from it make the ratification of the Covenants immediately effective.

The United Nations has cautioned that a State should not ratify the Covenants until its domestic laws and policies comply with the International legal obligations. Fiji is in the fortunate position that everything required is already in place.

Ratification promotes greater realisation of human rights with the potential to empower the disadvantaged and underprivileged and contribute to a more fair, just and inclusive society as always echoed by the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General.

Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence was also concerned about some issues in the area of human rights and spent significant amount of Committee time exploring the relevance of these issues. One concern that was raised by several of the submissions was that in many cases, human rights legislation was the product of people of European background and that their outlook was focussed on the single person and a European lifestyle and that this was only one sector of the population in Fiji and indeed the Pacific.

The *iTaukei* communities in this country live in significant numbers in a communal society, where many of the human rights protection need to be different to provide for the protection of *iTaukei* people while not diluting the protection of those living in a more singular lifestyle. There was also concern that their own unique culture and traditional religious beliefs needed to be considered.

We were made aware of this issue initially by the UNDP and the United Nations Human Rights Commission who made the presentations on the Covenants and who advised us to ensure the protection of the communal way of life. After careful consideration and responses to questions directed at human rights professionals in the field, we are sure that the ratification of the two Covenants will not diminish their protection but will, in a number of ways, assist in increasing it.

We were also concerned that the rights of people with disabilities were not reduced and can reassure this House that this is not the case.

In completion, Madam Speaker, our Government is satisfied that the ratification of the two United Nations Covenants will add significantly to the quality of Fiji's human rights protection and will bring with it many other tangible benefits to Fiji now and in the future. Ratification will increase Fiji's standing in the international community, demonstrating that we, as a nation, are responsible for the well-being of our citizens in all areas of their lives, that we are capable of standing with the leading nations and work together ensuring a better world.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I support the ratification of these two Covenants without reservations. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As a Member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence that went through these two Covenants, as alluded to by the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson that there was unanimous support for the ratification of the two Covenants, as a way forward, having ratified all the Human Rights Conventions, five have been ratified and so there are two more, so, nine altogether that are there for us for full ratification.

As highlighted too, perhaps I have just raised some in fairness for all the submitters to raise the challenges that were highlighted during the submissions, one of which was the lack of consultation on the two Covenants nationwide, especially in remote rural areas. In that respect, being written in the English language, there was a concern that it should be translated in vernacular or *iTaukei*, Rotuma, Hindi even Urdu for these two Covenants to go down to the people.

There was lack of time for the stakeholders, especially NGOs to properly scrutinise and raise awareness, lack of resources and leadership in conducting less awareness on the Treaty. There is the need to develop a national mechanism for reporting and follow up for treaties and conventions at the national level. These are the challenges that we came up with as raised by the submitters:

- Develop systems of check and balances to all businesses to account for breaches of workers' rights pertaining to decent work and decent pay;
- Linking Sustainable Development to the Human Rights in terms of addressing the 17 SDGs;
- Linking women's rights and children's rights to sustainable development through the UN SDGs;
- Treaties are new roles centric focused on individualism, whilst specific indigenous traditions, knowledge, language and customs focus on people and building relationships is Pacific centric;
- Pacific indigenous cultures are drowned by colonisation and globalisation. It is a challenge of the State to institute laws, policies and programmes, to take ownership of the indigenous culture, education, language and traditions.

Judiciary and the courts have used various provisions of the ICCPR and ICESCR in its judgements. The issue is on the resources on improving court processes and facilities. There is a need to improve remand facilities in the Correction Services to facilitate efficient and effective disposal of cases by the courts, keeping in mind the rights of the people in detention, the need to improve voter registration and electoral processes awareness amongst remote and rural communities is important. The rights of indigenous people, customs, traditions and knowledge need to be protected and adapted to Fijian generations. An impact of the ICCPR is the case of failed politicians step short to stir issues of national security, that is always on the back of security planners and academics.

I hope that reading all those challenges will satisfy the submitters that all their issues are brought up in this House for the House to take into consideration as far as the two Covenants for ratification for today are concerned. So in the end, Madam Speaker, it is proper for us to endorse those two Covenants as a way forward for Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jilila Kumar.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament: I also rise to contribute to the two Conventions that are before the House today.

Madam Speaker, 2018 is the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which we can call the "mother of International Human Right laws". The UDHR enshrines the idea that individuals have rights as human beings and they ought to be able to claim these rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as adopted by the United Nation General Assembly in 1966 to give force to the UDHR turning principles into more precise legal documents. Together, they are sometimes referred to as the International Bill of Rights.

It is indeed an auspicious year for Fiji to ratify these two Treaties. The exercise of these rights, Madam Speaker, shall be without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex,

language, religion, political, or any other opinion on the basis of social origin, property or any other status.

The Fijian Constitution has a broad framework of these non-discriminatory provisions, even broader than what these two Covenants do offer. This right, Madam Speaker, does not create new rights to Fiji because they are already embedded in the Constitution and the significance of this covenant, Madam Speaker, will supplement and further help to strengthen our legal order to impose these rights. In this regard, Madam Speaker, we may need to carry out a Legislative Review to identify key gaps and challenges on the existing legislation and policies because ratifying any Human Rights Convention requires a state party to bring its domestic laws and policies into compliance with the obligations under the particular conventions.

On the other hand, Madam Speaker, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights enshrines Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These are essentially group rights and are aimed at creating a more equitable society. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESC) are often referred to as “Positive Rights” because they require positive action by the State, namely the allocation of resources for their realisation. Under the ICESCR State parties undertake to take steps on their own or through international assistance and co-operation to progressively achieve the full realisation of ESC Rights recognised in the Covenant.

The ratification of the ICCPR and ICESCR would improve the wellbeing, security, dignity, lives and the livelihoods of the citizens of Fiji. It will indicate to the world that Fiji is serious about committing itself to human rights standards and would be compliant with the governance principles of accountability, transparency, participatory engagement with its citizens, equality and stronger respect of the rule of law. Fiji, Madam Speaker, is respected in the Pacific as a leader in many different areas and the ratification of the ICCPR and ICESCR and subsequent adherence and implementation of these laws in Fiji would also make Fiji a country to emulate in the Pacific region. For ICCPR and ICESCR, ratification and implementation to be successfully integrated in Fiji, we have to undergo a cultural mind-shift on human rights.

This mindset needs to occur at the highest level of office in the Government, within the Judiciary, the security sectors and to the young children in our country. In other words, Madam Speaker, we need to work together to make this ratification meaningful to our lives, otherwise, the ratification of these two Treaties will have minimal positive impact and will be symbolic only. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the ratification of the ICCPR and ICESCR without reservation. Thank you for your indulgence, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. We, from the NFP, support the ratification of this Treaty. At the outset, Madam Speaker, the two Covenants that we have here, altogether we have seven the number of conventions that we have worked towards on Human Rights and our Bill of Rights.

Madam Speaker, but we caution again that the Government will struggle in its reporting obligations as a State Party to this Treaty because of the sheer inconsistencies between the absolute rights and privileges on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that are afforded to every citizen in the Treaty and our own domestic laws.

Allow me therefore, Madam Speaker, to quote 2 excerpts of the preamble of this Convention:

“Recognising that in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights.

Realising that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present covenant.”

Madam Speaker, Article 1 of the Convention asserts that all peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue economic, social and cultural development.

Article 7 of the Convention, Madam Speaker, upholds that States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure in particular remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum with fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction. That is why we are promoting a living wage, Madam Speaker, of \$5.00 an hour. I struggle to see how the current minimum wage of \$2.68 per hour can be justified when we need to report as part of our State Party obligations.

In Article 8 of the Convention, Madam Speaker, again like the ICCPR affirms:

“The right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice, subject only to the rules of the organisation concerned, for the promotion and protection of his economic and social interests. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interest of national security or public order or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others.”

And we all know that there are laws at present that restrict trade unionist and union staff from becoming members of political parties.

Article 14 of the Convention says “Each state party to the present Covenant which, at the time of becoming a party, has not been able to secure in its metropolitan territory or other territories under its jurisdiction compulsory primary education, free of charge, undertakes within two years, to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation within a reasonable number of years, to be fixed in the plan of the principle of compulsory education free of charge for all.” We will have work to do on that front, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I note in Article 15 part 1(c) it says that “State Parties to the present covenant recognise the right of everyone to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.”

If you recall, Madam Speaker, we have urged before that laws that are sitting in the Solicitor-General’s Office pertaining to access and benefit sharing on genetic resources and traditional knowledge are critical in this age of bio-piracy theft.

Madam Speaker, however, I am encouraged by the Report of the Committee and I thank the Committee for the report; the Committee notes that in respect of this ratification that the Parliament’s ratification of the Treaty will require the necessary commitment from the Government

and its relevant agencies in terms of effective implementation of the domestic, legislation, systems and processes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, just a brief contribution. Madam Speaker, I am listening to the debate and I am asking in my mind how this will dovetail into or interfere with the indigenous culture or the *vanua* in their cultural way of living, the need to maintain their cultural identity and I have come to the conclusion that the adoption of these will complement it.

So I urge us all, please, accept this and I am encouraged, especially by the Chairman of the Committee, when he made reference to Article 1, for example, which says that ‘all people have the right to self-determination’ and that has been one of the things that we, as an indigenous group, have been asking. Please, give us the right of determination, to decide for ourselves what we want to do with our culture and it says also further to that, ‘that the States should promote the realisation of the right to self-determination’.

So, this side of the House, we are happy that once we adapt this, we can work towards that, and I am encouraged as well that he made reference to Article 15 which says, ‘the State parties to the present covenant recognise the right of everyone to take part in their cultural life’. We have been asking this Government to, “Please, allow us to do that; please, allow us to address this House in our native tongue; please allow us our right to decide for ourselves,” so I am very happy for that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I am not allowed to speak in my native tongue here, am I? Does that not interfere with Article 15? So, after this I hope we will work towards that. This will encourage us, this will allow us to work towards that, that is my point and I am also encouraged, Madam Speaker, when I hear Honourable Howard Politini about the submission that was made on this by the Human Rights, UNDP, I believe. They made reference to the fact that Human Rights we feel was mainly for the Western kind of thought, individual, but this will allow it to also recognise the rights of cultural communities. So, that is very very good and even Honourable Jilila Kumar referred to Group Rights and that is what we have been referring to.

So, I feel, Madam Speaker, the adoption of this

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, you can joke, you can laugh, the adoption of this is one more reason to persuade the Government to remove the laws that are taking away Cultural Rights. One more reason to remove the law that terminated the Great Council of Chiefs because if that restricts us in complying with Article 15, that is part of the cultural life.

There is one more reason to remove the laws that nationalise the *vanua* because that will allow us to independently maintain our Fijian Affairs without it being as it is now being part of government. One more reason for the government, to amend the Act relating to the Management of the *iTaukei* Land Trust Act because they have nationalised that and they managed that. Once we accept this, this will be a good reason for Government, to relook at all these laws and remove them. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do support the ratification of these Treaties and as I see it, Part 3 in this book it says on Part 3.2.4:

“Ratification without implementation will mean nothing for Fiji moving forward”.

So, it is very imperative and very, very important for us to conform to the standards that are given. Just like my colleague has said that we know that the government will have to struggle in its reporting obligations as a State party to this Treaty because of the sheer inconsistencies between the absolute rights and privileges on civil and political rights that are afforded to every citizen in the Treaty and our own domestic laws.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. P. CHAND.- Qorvis did not write this. The ICCPR says in its preamble, Madam Speaker, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom, and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created, whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social and cultural rights.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- The UN Convention Ratification is long overdue, Madam Speaker, hopefully it is not only the recommendation of the 2014 Elections Multi Observer Group Report that is in their compulsion.

Madam Speaker, Elections in all likelihood are going to be held under the same restrictive and regressive laws that needed substantial amendments as per the recommendations of the MOG and the former Electoral Commission in its Annual Report of 2014.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- Apart from cosmetic changes, we cannot claim much on that front, Madam Speaker. Both 2014 Reports of the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) and the previous Electoral Commission have been before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for almost two years. The Committee has not reported back to Parliament, why is there such an unreasonable delay? This is very important as Elections are around the corner, so it is very, very important.

We had a Bill yesterday ...

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- A Point of Order.

HON. P. CHAND.- ...which just took two months.

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, it is well known that the Reports are before this Committee and we are handling it. We have called for submissions, the public had appeared before us and they have given their submissions. The matter, as we all know, was discussed in the Business Committee that there were Bills that have come in and that is the reason

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

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The Point of Order is that, you are trying to mislead, it is before the Committee. Go and read the Standing Orders.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, something that are before the Standing Committee cannot be discussed in Parliament.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- It is before the Standing Committee.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- No, he asked what was reason for the unreasonable delay? We are discussing it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- That is right, any issue that is being discussed in the Standing Committee should not be brought into Parliament.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, we hope also that this rush ratification is not only Fiji's campaign to win a seat on the UN Human Rights Council this year.

We have raised this time and time again that we the people were not afforded the privilege of consultation and input into the 2013 Constitution. So we may fall short on that front because Part 2, Article 2, Section 2 states, and I quote: "Where not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures, each State party to the present Covenant undertakes to take the necessary steps in accordance with these Constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant to adapt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights of recognising the present Covenant."

Madam Speaker, we cannot fast-track nor ratify with reservations nor spin-doctor our obligations...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- ... because we should be walking into these international obligations with our eyes wide open.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- There is no reservation.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, in our Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Commission we cannot pass the six tests of the Paris Principles to meet the standard of a bona fide National Human Rights Institution. Fiji, as a State party, will struggle.

A National Human Rights Institution is the first guardian of human rights protection. It should help bolster the State to ensure that its human rights track record is tallying. It must be an institution that can hold up a mirror to the State and will enable the State to strengthen itself.

That cannot happen, Madam Speaker, if, for example, our Commission does not have its proper Commission and Chairperson in place because contracts have expired. That cannot happen, Madam Speaker, if the Director of a Commission has a FICAC complaint lodged against him. As legislators, Madam Speaker, we are duty-bound to sound the alarm that we will not pass the test of ICCPR obligation as a State Party and allow me to detail one.

Article 19 of the Convention protects the right to hold opinions without interference. The right to freedom of expression knowing that there are rights and responsibilities, for the rights and reputations of others and national security and public order.

The Online Safety Act passed by Honourable Members on the other side of the House yesterday will, I am sure, be closely scrutinised by the world as it was by the many submittees nationally.

Article 21 of the Convention, Madam Speaker, protects the right of peaceful assembly and restrictions are specific.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- That is, no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed on conformity with the law, and which are necessary in a democratic society, in the interest of national security or public safety, public order that is ordinary public, the protection of public health or morals of the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Trade Unions had wanted to hold a march in April. The Fiji Police Force refused their permit with no reasonable explanation. Will that change upon the ratification of this Convention?

Madam Speaker, Article 22 of the Convention states that everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of its interest.

We all know that there are laws at present that restrict Trade Unionists and Union staff from becoming members of political parties. Madam Speaker, we know that there will be many, many other inconsistencies that will arise in the laws that we have, and the standard we must reach in this International Convention.

Madam Speaker, I thank the Committee for coming up with this initiative.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- We are for the ratification but there are many things that the Government needs to fix up before they are able to comply with this, it is very important. May I tell the Honourable Members on the other side that we also have intellect, we can write our own speeches. We do not pay Qorvis \$2 million to \$3 million a year.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to give my brief contribution on this Convention.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee for the great effort in compiling this Report, highlighting the different Articles in the Report and also the challenges. As we ratify this Convention, the Government is given a great task to try to implement what has been included in this Convention, Madam Speaker.

As we note yesterday, the Fair Share of Mineral Royalties Bill was also passed in Parliament. I would also like to commend the Committee, as this will also address some of the landownership issues in terms of economic participation. As we all know, Madam Speaker, in Article 25, it talks about non-discriminatory and minority rights in equality before the law. I think the indigenous people have also, at length, greatly tried to have increased economic participation to be on par in terms of entrepreneurship in Fiji.

I think previous Government, the SDL Government had also put in place the machinery that will enhance this particular participation indiscriminatory clauses in which we really wish to address this economic participation for indigenous people. They have put up a 2020 Plan which has addressed mostly some of the inequitable, say distribution in terms of the fruits of development, inequitable distribution in terms of business enterprises.

For too long we have been regarded as asset-rich but cash-poor, and hopefully this particular ICCPR will address those particular issues.

Madam Speaker, we also note that the commitment for COP23, the NDCs will also encourage indigenous involvement in terms of resource participation to address the COP23 targets. Hopefully, with the ratification of this ICCPR it will address some of the discriminatory policies in terms of economic participation for indigenous people of this country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members; as a Member of the Committee, I take this opportunity to support the motion in regards to the debate of the Treaty, ICESCR before the House.

The benefits of Fiji ratifying the ICESCR is one that will strengthen Fiji's international standing as advocate of human rights in the Asia-Pacific Region. The ratification will improve Fiji's standing in the international community and attract some foreign investment and improving in general the wellbeing of all Fijians. The ratification also provides an opportunity for Fiji to improve its check and balance system, accountability and governance.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, upon ratification will provide a conducive environment for good governance that will enable sustainability, economic development, strengthen the rule of law that will attract foreign investment and overseas donor agencies in the UN like, the environmental and bilateral agencies. Therefore, Madam Speaker, as stated, the recommendation made by the Committee is given due consideration by Government and addressed appropriately.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments, as a Member, I support the ratification of the Treaty without reservations. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I also rise to support this and I think all has been mentioned by the Committee and I have got a few issues to mention. This is in regards to some countries, I think, 33 countries are yet to ratify, including Fiji. But what I would like to bring to the attention of this Honourable House is that, some countries have ratified the ICCPR and ICESCR, even USA. Some have signed but they have not ratified yet. That is why it is very important, as already mentioned by the Chairperson, that there will be an awareness regarding these Covenants, the ICCPR and ICESCR.

Why I want to bring up this issue, Madam Speaker, so that it will be known to the grassroots and people of this nation what this is all about, then we ratify, before we submit our Report to the Committee in Geneva.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, in regard to the culture, the Constitution is here. The Chiefs in our country with regard to culture, will respect this Constitution. There are few Chiefs here - *Tui Namosi*, *Tui Nadogo*, *Tui Namuka* and *Tui Cakau*, who have their rules and regulations in their own *tikina*. But if there is an offence being committed in their *tikina* or *vanua*, they will always end up with the Constitution. They will send them to the Police. They cannot solve the problem, Madam Speaker, that is the answer.

With that short contribution, Madam Speaker, I support the ratification.

HON. SPEAKER.- Before we have the right of reply, I think the Leader of Government has a suspension motion to table.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Leader of the Government, would you like to speak on your motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. We still have a few Items in today's Order Paper and we hope that the Honourable Members of the House would allow us to complete it, so that we have more days for the Opposition tomorrow. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite comments from the Honourable Members, if any?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being none, would you like to make concluding remarks?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- No, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.-The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

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 Items as listed in today's Order Paper.

I thank you all that no one is opposing this motion and the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

I now call on the Honourable Acting Prime Minister to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, just a few comments in response to some of the issues that have been raised. I would like to thank most of the Honourable Members of Parliament who have actually supported these two Treaties for ratification or these two Conventions, I should say.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that as far as some of the functional part of things and processes are concerned, I think some of the Honourable Members from the other side actually complained about how little time it had.

Madam Speaker, the Standing Orders actually says, once a Convention or Treaty is referred to the Committee, the Committee must come back to Parliament within 30 days. So it is as per the Standing Orders, there is nothing untoward about it. It is the job of the Committee, if they feel they need to go out to the interior of Naitasiri, it is for them to go there and they have to make that available. So it is nothing untoward about saying it is too short of time, that is what the Standing Order says and they are actually complying with it.

Madam Speaker, the other point also just before I mention about some of the other issues that have been mentioned is that, the Fijian Constitution as highlighted, Madam Speaker, has a very comprehensive set of Bill of Rights. Under Section 7 of the Bill of Rights, Madam Speaker, it says also that the Judiciary can refer to International Law. What is the premise of International Law?

International Law fundamentally, Madam Speaker, is the premise of International Conventions. International Conventions give substance to International Law, so in other words even prior to the ratification of this, our Judicial System, our Constitutional System actually allows for our courts to be able to refer to International Conventions, notwithstanding the fact that we have not ratified.

As has been highlighted by the Committee, Madam Speaker, the reality is that the current provision in the Constitution, irrespective of the garble that comes from Honourable Parmod Chand, in respect of "these rights are not there", that is utter nonsense because it has been given to him, he just simply read it out, he does not understand it. He does not even know the word 'minions' and what it means, so we cannot take him on the basis of what he had said, Madam Speaker.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, that the rights in the Constitution actually complement or I should say the other way we can conversely say, the rights in the Convention actually complement what the Constitution already has.

The Honourable Chairperson, the Honourable Howard Politini and other Honourable Members had quite eloquently stated what are the similar provisions in the Constitution that actually complement the provisions in these two Conventions.

Madam Speaker, again, the other point is that, unfortunately Honourable Nawaikula has this habit and I do feel for him sometimes because I think what has actually happened somewhere along the line, he got hold of one or two words along the lines perhaps, when he was doing the Deed of Sovereignty in 2000, Madam Speaker, and grabbed on a few words and said, "Okay, this is it".

Now he talks about 'right of self-determination', Madam Speaker, if you look at the history, if you want to talk about International Law, you have to look at the history of what words have meant.

(Hon. N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, listen!

Madam Speaker, in the colonial context, when the bulk of the countries in the world were colonised by fundamental European powers and America, the right to self-determination meant 'decolonisation'. Madam Speaker, it meant 'decolonisation'. This is why, Madam Speaker, if you look at the Convention in the 1960s, the right to self-determination meant in that context.

In the wider frame of things, Madam Speaker, the right to self-determination, yes, for some indigenous communities meant because they were completely decimated, they were obliterated from the face of the earth in some countries. As I mentioned the other day unfortunately, he was not here, they killed all the Tasmanian Aborigines. In Canada, they were put on Reserves, so the right to self-determination within that context meant that you need to be able to give them some form of governance in the territory where you put them in, so they can apply certain rules of theirs.

Because, Madam Speaker, they were given what they call 'territorial autonomy' in those areas, so Canada which a very large country some of the inuits, for example, were put in one corner of the country and they said, "All right, you can go and govern yourselves". But that was never used to undermine a sovereign state. That is what you always try to say you can do, it does not mean that.

Madam Speaker, there is numerous rulings by Committees, including the UN Committee of Minority Rights, that has also determined that you cannot use group rights in that context to trump individual rights.

I am glad Honourable Politini actually talked about the issue about whether these Conventions are peculiarly European in nature. But, Madam Speaker, as the Conventions state, even the UN Declaration states that every individual human right and human being has an individual right, and that right cannot be trumped by any other rights. Over here, different Conventions are being used to trump other rights. They can sit in quite perfectly, Madam Speaker.

He goes on about the ILO Convention on Indigenous Rights which only 22 countries have ratified, Madam Speaker. This is why to-date the UN has never had a Convention on indigenous rights, knowing what it means for the sovereign State. It has only a declaration, he knows that.

Madam Speaker, to come here and say that these Conventions will be the only basis through which culture and unique identity will be protected are utter nonsense. The Constitution already does that and in a quiet and unique manner, Madam Speaker, and in an unprecedented manner.

Madam Speaker, apart from the fact that the Preamble is there, even if you read Section 26. The 1997 Constitution did not even have equality provision regarding culture, it did not have it.

There are numerous provisions now under the Unfair Discrimination Provisions that actually has it, Madam Speaker, and then he comes up and says, “Now this Convention will promote culture.” The Unfair Discrimination provision regarding culture has been done in a practical sense, what has happened?

With the absence of the GCC, has that meant that the *iTaukei* people have lost their identity? Are the *iTaukei* people over here all lost? Have they lost their language? Have they lost their culture? Have they stopped being able to perform traditional ceremonies? Have we stopped promoting the indigenous culture? Absolutely not! It still continues, Madam Speaker. We say, it is thriving today, it is thriving.

We have now various institutes set up to protect indigenous language and culture. We have translated the documents on climate change in the *iTaukei* language, has never been done before. Madam Speaker, what they have done, their analysis of the so-called “loss of identity” is all politically motivated. It is the politicisation of ethnicity. It is not about the legal premise of what their actual rights are.

He stands here and claims that the iTLTB has been nationalised. He claims that iTaukei Affairs Board has been nationalised.

(Hon. N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Absolutely not! On what basis is he saying it has been nationalised?

The previous Ministers for iTaukei Affairs used to sit as Chairpersons too, well, why they did not say it is being nationalised.

The iTaukei Affairs Board is running the same way it was run before, but how come it has been nationalised, Madam Speaker? Because he is misleading the people of Fiji. They are trying to appeal to this sort of, what we call “primordial” type of emotions, to whip them up into some kind of frenzy.

Madam Speaker, let me tell Parliament that that type of rhetoric and demagoguery is losing its currency. The younger people of Fiji are not being deluded by this nonsense.

Similarly, with the Honourable Parmod Chand, he comes here and talks about all their rights being waned away because we have this similar provision. Madam Speaker, utter nonsense! He does not understand the provisional rights and how it works. If you go to every single country in the world, every single country has a restriction of some form of right. Go to Australia, go to New Zealand.

The problem is, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that Government has moved along. This Government now, with the ratification of this Convention, we would have ratified seven

Conventions. We have moved along the right sphere. They are still caught in the time warp. They still think we are living 10, 11 years behind.

They are caught in a time warp, Madam Speaker, and unfortunately their political capital is built on that time warp; that is the problem. Their political capital is built on that time warp and they cannot extricate themselves, notwithstanding the fact that circumstances and the facts have changed. The facts have changed and they cannot keep up with the facts. So, you see them, their lawyers and everyone else keep saying, "Make Fiji free again, we will give freedom." *Areh*, the freedom is there, there is more freedom than ever before!

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You go out of this Parliamentary Chamber, you see people talking about issues today, they could never speak of before. Our young people are more free today than ever before. Of course, Madam Speaker, they talked about the Online Safety, what nonsense!

We have, of course, people here and I have been sent some *Facebook* pages of couples of journalists, who they probably know saying, "Oh, this Online Safety means that we cannot say anything about the civil servants. If there is corruption we cannot say that. If we are going to make some comment against Government Members, we cannot do that." What nonsense!

The Online Safety Bill is about visual images, in particular, pertaining to children. This is the kind of nonsense and the untruths that is being spread. Even though they are doing it, they cannot be charged under this Online Safety Bill.

Madam Speaker, the problem is that because of the fact that they are caught in this time warp, unable to extricate themselves the quality and level of debate and contribution from them is actually quite pedestrian from the other side. It is what we call very paltry in nature, absolutely paltry in nature!

Madam Speaker, they talked about the Paris Principle, they talked about the Human Rights. Madam Speaker, why? Leave the Director of Human Rights Commissioner alone, please? He is doing his job. We are not doing this to satisfy some seats in the Human Rights Council, we gave an undertaking, and we are fulfilling this. Even Honourable Niko Nawaikula said this Convention is good, although his rationale for that has actually warped but the fact of the matter is, that he believes the Convention is good.

Madam Speaker, the Convention is a good Convention. We should be happy about it. The Honourable Parmod Chand said, "We should not have reservations", there is no reservations. Have I stood up and said there is reservations? No, because someone wrote it for him, thinking we will put reservations, that is the problem. So, the quality of the debate, Madam Speaker, is unfortunately very limited.

Madam Speaker, I say, that those kinds of submission from Honourable Parmod Chand and NFP actually are extremely unpatriotic. If they were truly concerned about furthering the culture of human rights in our country, they would actually push for us to try and get a seat in the Human Rights Council. So, by doing that we actually hold ourselves up to the world.

We need to be patriotic about that. The cynicism, the lack of belief in what we are doing is their downfall. Madam Speaker, at the practical level. that is what we are doing. We are all Fijian citizens, we are all Fijians, we need to be patriotic about our country. We need to see how best we can work together to establish ourselves and stick to international norms and, in fact, accept and

adopt international norms that will actually give us a lot of credibility. It does fit in with the overall ability to market yourself as a product, as a country to get the investment, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, again, he is saying “We cannot trade unions”. Of course, we can join trade unions, they can join trade unions, anyone can join trade unions. Again, I want to say that as has been highlighted by all the other bright contributing Members of the Committee and Members of Parliament that the ICCPR and ICESCR well fit in with the provision of the Fijian Constitution.

Madam Speaker, also it means that Fiji as has been, it has never struggled in providing reports to the Committee. We have provided reports on CEDAW, we provided reports on CERD and various other Conventions that we have ratified. Similarly, we will provide reports on this, Madam Speaker, and again the civil society will provide what they call ‘the shadow report’, and we work with them.

Madam Speaker, you have actually been a Minister of Women and attended the CEDAW Convention where we had actually filed the reports and we can see how it works well. This will also give us the ability as a country or whichever Party is in Government to be able to ensure that they actually stick to the Conventions. It is not just about FijiFirst, it is about other political parties that may form Government one day, hopefully in 20 or 30 years’ time.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that, as the Chairperson, Honourable Netani Rika has actually pointed out that what really matters are the practical implications of how we are implementing these Conventions. So when you talk about ICESCR we need to talk about education being made free. We are talking about things like rural pregnant women being given food vouchers, we are talking about accessibility to water, electricity, about social protection. Today, we have Fijians who are being given FNPF social pension because, Madam Speaker, that all falls within ICESCR. These are the social protections and the practical implementation issues that stem from the Conventions themselves, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I urge notwithstanding some of the convoluted way of thinking from the other side, and I am sure everyone and I hope that we get an unanimous acceptance of the ratifications of these two Conventions, Madam Speaker.

The reality is that these Conventions are already replicated within the Fijian Constitution, as highlighted I think by Honourable Sudhakar, that for verbatim we have some of the provisions. In fact, they should actually take solace and comfort from the fact that the drafters of this Constitution actually refer to this Convention so it makes it easier so that we can copy this in verbatim and now we have it, so we have to implement it.

Again, these Conventions does report it to the Committee in Geneva but because the provisions of the Convention are in the Constitution, they are enforceable by individual Fijians in Fiji.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Hear! Hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If they believe these rights have been breached, they can take the State to court, they can take the Government to court, they can take your private company to court, they can take a club to court, they can take a parent, teacher, rugby union, football association, municipal councils, or whatever organisation to court, they can do that because the Constitution allows them to do that, and the Constitution is a reflection of these two Conventions, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, therefore, I recommend that we support the ratification of these two Conventions and we look forward to the deposit of the Instruments. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That Pursuant to Standing Order 130(4), the Parliament approves the following Treaties:

1. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and
2. The International Covenant on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to move her motion, I wish to clarify that at the end of the debate we will be voting merely to note the Report and once the vote is taken, it ends there and the Report will not be debated again in Parliament.

I now call upon on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to move the motion.

REVIEW REPORT OF THE RESERVE BANK OF FIJI INSURANCE ANNUAL REPORT 2016

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report 2016 which was tabled on 7th March, 2018.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion.

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on the motion in relation to the Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report of 2016.

Madam Speaker, the Insurance Industry in Fiji is primarily regulated and supervised by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF), and in order to successfully carry out the role bestowed upon them, the RBF aims to protect the interests of policy holders and while doing so, also ensures the safety and soundness of licence insurers, brokers and agents.

The overall performance of the Fijian Insurance Industry, Madam Speaker, remains sound in 2016, despite the significant damage caused by *TC Winston* which, Madam Speaker, incurred the highest claims pay-out to-date for the general insurance sector.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, the Committee felt that in general, the attitude towards insurance, was still very conservative and that a continuous awareness programme was essential in order to encourage more of our citizens to safeguard themselves against the unexpected.

It is imperative, Madam Speaker, for the people of Fiji to understand the importance of being insured in order to safeguard themselves from uncertainties, especially given the fact that Fiji is prone to natural disasters like *TC Winston* which had a catastrophic effect on the country as a whole in early 2016. There are other types of calamities, including fire, earthquakes, flood, and then of course there are health and life and death accidents that can also strike without warning.

We were pleased to note, Madam Speaker, that the Insurance Industry continue to strive for a greater penetration into the general insurance market through new and innovative initiatives. Some of these initiatives that have already come to fruition, Madam Speaker, are the Fiji Care Bundled Micro-Insurance Product. This product at the time of our Report had provided 11,606 registered cane growers with access to some form of insurance at a premium of just \$1 per week or \$52 per annum.

By the way, Madam Speaker, our Committee had commented that we look forward to similar packages being introduced and made available to other sources in agriculture, including livestock farmers and possibly spreading across other industries, like tourism, garment, mining, manufacturing, et cetera, and I am pleased to advise that this same package has now become available to rice farmers, so I am sure that other sectors will follow in good time.

Another was BIMA, Madam Speaker, which is a Micro Insurance Product that began in 2016. BIMA is a mobile insurance initiative by Dominion Insurance and Digicel, offering a life insurance cover and the hospitalisation cover at just 15 cents per day which equates to \$1.05 per week.

As at the end of August, 2017; 25,234 Digicel subscribers were covered under the BIMA product plan and after a thorough assessment of its impact on the market, it was comfortably confirmed that BIMA had increased the insurance penetration in Fiji from 12 percent to 15 percent.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, was the initiative taken by BSP that has broadened the range of offerings per healthcare at what was Suva Private Hospital, now called MIOT Hospital. This initiative, Madam Speaker, enables the reduction of a great number of cases that could only be treated overseas to be now locally treated here in Fiji at MIOT, thus bringing overall costs down considerably.

All in all, Madam Speaker, the Committee was pleased with the Report and recommended that a continuous awareness programme be put in place to inspire more of our citizens to safeguard themselves against the unexpected by taking up some form of insurance.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I invite comments from Honourable Members, if any?

Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to make some comments on the Report by the Committee.

I am a Member of the Committee, Madam Speaker, and I just wish to commend the work of the RBF, the way they regulate and supervise the insurance industry in Fiji. They are doing a wonderful job and even though our attitude towards insurance is still very conservative, they are very successful in providing the supervision, regulation that has created a very vibrant and very stable industry in Fiji.

On some of the recommendations, Madam Speaker, I would like to just speak on a number of them. Recommendation No. 4, says that the Committee notes that the rate of forfeiture for life insurance policies of 53.2 percent is traditionally high, and would wish that all efforts are made to reduce this rate, as it directly translate to loses for our people concerned.

What is it, Madam Speaker? We noticed that consistently, the number of people who default or lose their policies is 58 percent. What it means is that, after a number of years of contributing of a life insurance cover, as soon as it lapses may be after two or three months of non-payment, you lose that totally.

We asked the insurance companies on what ways we can try and resolve this because this could be a lot of low income people, and you can imagine if you had been contributing faithfully for five or six years and all of a sudden you lapse, you totally lose that, and the forfeiture rates has always been 58 percent, very high at that level.

I remember, I was asked by the bank to go and manage a resort that had gone into receivership. On the day I arrived, the day before I could not touch anything that is previous because of the laws of receivership.

I saw there the grief of those who are affected by that through their insurance policies. We tried to work out ways to have them recover that but it was very difficult. That is something that we really need as leaders, to try and rectify. I am sure you can all relate to what I am saying here. They are our people, have been faithfully paid and then the receivership which is not their fault, they lose their job and their insurance policy. So hopefully, we can come up with something, maybe we can provide some bridging, accommodation to accommodate them, during the period while they are out of employment and the like. But 58 percent forfeiture is very, very high.

Secondly, on Recommendation No. 5, it is believed that Government is looking into the insurance of its assets. The Committee recommends that consideration is also given to include Evacuation Centres. Additionally, all Evacuation Centres in villages and settlements should be insurable, meaning that they are compliant with building codes. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that our people in Evacuation Centres are safe.

Madam Speaker, I had brought this up in the past. Now, that we are having cyclones regularly and the like, we want to make sure, we want to be comfortable that wherever our people are in Fiji are seeking shelter in a structure that is safe.

Madam Speaker, some of us may remember *Cyclone Meli*. I believe the village of Vabea, in the height of the cyclone they ran to the church for shelter and the church collapsed. I think you can remember all of that.

For me now, Madam Speaker, because I am a Parliamentarian and my constituency is the whole of Fiji, I have sleepless nights during cyclones, wondering whether our people who will

invariably seek shelter in the Village's Evacuation Centre, whether that Centre is safe. The Vabea case is still very clear to me because I remember that I was a young man and I think most of us here know what happened then.

So, Madam Speaker, it behoves us to relook at the Evacuation Centres. Of course, I do not want to bring politics into this. SDL has set out to build village halls. If it had not been overthrown, then every village in Fiji would have had a village hall that would be compliant, and able to withstand cyclones and the like. I mean, it was too bad that the FijiFirst Government has not continued with this.

But you can redeem yourself, FijiFirst, by just making sure that these village halls are properly structured. I am not talking about building a new one, just making sure they are structurally sound and it can be done. I brought it up at one point and the Honourable Minister for Agriculture said that they have done one in Narata. Like I said, Madam Speaker, I am not asking for new ones but every village hall, I think, can be strengthened so that all of us can sleep well at night when a cyclone is hitting Fiji.

Recommendation No. 8; we are suggesting here that the Committee notes that the vulnerability of members of the general public in securing insurance cover that is suitable perhaps, suitable for them, in the same way that brokers advise their corporate clients.

What we discovered, Madam Speaker, was that perhaps, some of our people are over insuring, they are taking on policies that they cannot afford. They are up against some very professional sales people. I am sure you have all met insurance sales people, they are very convincing, and imagine putting one of our low income earning worker against the insurance person; the influence, the persuasive power they have, a lot of people end up buying more than they can afford, hence the forfeiture rate.

So perhaps, we can ask some agencies like the Consumer Council or others to be available to advise our people on what they can afford to take. In the corporate world, Madam Speaker, a company will not go directly to the under-writer, they go through what we call a "broker". The broker's role is to advise the company on what is suitable for them, and they play the role and in that way a lot of corporate people do not take on excess insurance. So, hopefully because the losses to our people are quite huge, like the forfeiture rate, maybe we could set up the legal aid people or some agencies and task them with advising our people on what is suitable for them in terms of insurance they should take.

Those are some of the comments that I wish to make, Madam Speaker, and in closing, let me just say that things are improving as indicated by our Chairperson, penetration has improved from 12 to 15 in some areas, and that is a good sign. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Committee for the support but just to highlight some of the key issues in particular about some of the new products that do need to be developed as has been highlighted that the micro insurance that had been put up, for example, the sugarcane farmers and we understand the rice farmers and various other corporate farmers who have taken advantage of that, including some of the dairy farmers.

Madam Speaker, we are very much concerned in respect of insurance for crops and also insurance for household with some basic requirements being met as far as the engineering standards

are concerned. So less onerous requirements but to get some form of cover and the fact of the matter is that, this particular couple of cyclones that we have had, demonstrates to us the quick need to ensure that we have products in that space for insurance cover.

Madam Speaker, the other point that we have also highlighted previously in Parliament, yes, the RBF has been very prudent about the manner in which they have allowed the insurance companies to operate, but also we have stated before that the RBF, at least, a few decades ago and that could have been built upon slowly, should have been far more demanding of insurance companies.

For example, Madam Speaker, in certain jurisdictions, the insurance companies have to sell particular products. So for example, if you live in Ba and Nadi, Madam Speaker, in a large commercial entity, you cannot get flood cover, they simply will just not give it to you. Insurance companies, if you live in Nadi and Ba, if you go and want to get flood cover, Honourable Prem Singh can vouch for this, they will not give you products say, “No, we do not cover this area. They will only give it to the large companies.”

So we believe that the insurance companies and the RBF should have placed a demand on insurance companies to offer these products, even if there were some ceilings placed on it, they should have offered their product because that gives ordinary Fijians some level of protection.

In the same way, Madam Speaker, when I was in the private sector, there was certain laws that we had subsequently changed, for example, if you had a life insurance product and you could assign your insurance product to say, a money lender. There was a famous money lender in Rakiraki, he has actually benefited from this quite handsomely and everyone knows about this money lender.

So if, for example, I have got a \$20,000 life insurance and a \$15,000 life insurance product, presuming I am working in Volivoli Resort or Wananavu Resort and I am paying from my salary every fortnight and I have a \$15,000 or \$20,000 life insurance product and assuming I need \$2,000, so what the moneylenders used to do, they would actually get the person to assign the policy to them, that all the benefits under the policy would go to the moneylender in the event that this person did not pay the debt or he/she died before the debt was paid. Invariably, Madam Speaker, a lot of the times it did happen. So the person may have taken out \$2,000 loan from the moneylender and he or she dies and the debts are not paid, the entire \$15,000 or \$20,000 goes to the moneylender and they took the whole sum.

I remember working at that time for Colonial Life Insurance Company, one of the companies that I worked for as in-house counsel, families would come to us and say, “You know my husband, for example, had a \$20,000 Life Insurance Policy and I have not got anything” and the moneylender would say, “Here is \$1,000, good luck to you.” It used to happen, and that obviously has stopped now because you can only limit it and with the laws we have changed to ensure that the assignment is only up to the level of the debt.

So again, Madam Speaker, these are some of the areas that we think that RBF as a regulator, could have over the years you know addressed. Similarly, the point that has been highlighted by one of the speakers regarding the forfeiture rates, that is something again that could be looked at, Madam Speaker, as to how we can address it.

What is really interesting just to highlight the attitude on some of the insurance companies, Madam Speaker, as you know and some of the Honourable Members of the Opposition also attended the first pay-out under the Accident Compensation Act 2017 which has been put in place,

that is, getting rid of third party insurance and now certain levies are paid, it goes to the Commission and there is what we call a “no-fault approach” to it. So in other words if I get hit by a car, or if I am a passenger in a car, as long as the injury is being proven and the accident has been proven, irrespective of whose fault it is, you will get a pay-out. And the first pay-out was made, it was done only within a couple of months. I think someone had raised it the other day saying, “How long does it take?” It is done within a couple of months.

Madam Speaker, this audacity of Sun Insurance to then subsequently take the Fijian Government to court to say it is unconstitutional to do that. This is the attitude of some of the insurance companies and it is a very very poor reflection, Madam Speaker. They do make stacks of money from other products and in fact, we have recently been told that this particular company has been saying that, “Because we no longer get revenue from third party insurance, we now will have to put up premium rates for other insurance products.” That is not right.

Your premium pricing of insurance products should be based on your risk, not because that that product is no longer available and your revenue loss from there can now be transferred off to some other product, that is wrong, and we hope that the RBF will keep a close eye on this, because we want all Fijians to get as much insurance products available at their fingertips as possible.

We obviously want as many Fijians to get life insurance products. We have said this morning that we are going to introduce a National Health Insurance Scheme. There are some people who may actually want to take something over and above the National Health Insurance Scheme, so again medical insurance needs to be made available. I would caution, Madam Speaker, and urge the RBF which, of course, is an independent body that regulates insurance companies amongst its other functions, that it does keep a close eye on insurance companies. Insurance companies are critical financial institutions in any economy, and we believe there should be much closer regulation and indeed direction given.

In the same way, Madam Speaker, banks for decades in Fiji, the RBF unlike other companies, if you go to some countries, they will tell them that a certain percentage of their loan portfolio must be given for home lending and the interest rate must be no higher than this. They have done in other countries, Fiji never did that.

Now, of course, we have now got some provisions as announced in the Budget but as an independent regulator, the RBF did not see its role in that space. They simply were there looking after their prudential requirements. They should be guiding these agencies in that respect because can you imagine, Madam Speaker, if 20 or 30 years ago, the RBF then had directed the banks to say a certain a percentage of your loan portfolio must go to low income people at this interest rate. Today, we would have had a much higher rate of home ownership, a much higher rate and that culture would have developed.

Madam Speaker, I would urge the RBF as regulator to be a bit more proactive and give some direction to these insurance companies and indeed, other financial institutions because at the end of the day, even if premium rates do come down, the increase in volume will actually make up for the supposed loss in revenue. And that is very critical because you need to get that critical mass to be able to ensure that we get better quality products and indeed and ultimately at the end of the day, to provide better services to ordinary Fijians. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, 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.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to move the motion.

**2004-2009 CONSOLIDATED REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT,
PRODUCTIVITY AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Reports from 2004 to 2009 for the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now, I invite the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and the Honourable Members of the House: on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion. During the scrutiny process, the Committee had reviewed all the six Annual Reports from the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, the Committee noted that the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations journey from 2004 to 2009 was very challenging as the Ministry had been going through the Labour Reforms. The Year 2008 saw the establishment and activation of the National Employment Centre (NEC).

Madam Speaker, during the period the Ministry also continued with the Reform of Wages Councils and the Workmen's Compensation Act 1964. Taking into consideration the time lapse from 2009 to 2018 the Committee has taken note of the contents of the six Annual Reports from the Ministry of Labour, Productivity and Industrial Relations and anticipates that during the past nine years, corrective actions will have been taken by the Ministry to address the challenges encountered in its operations as well as in service delivery.

So, Madam Speaker, in closing, the Committee acknowledges the Ministry's continued efforts towards enhancing its performance and service delivery. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite comments from the Members, if any. There being no comments. Would you like to make concluding remarks?

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- No further comments, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to know the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

The motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT
AND NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT 2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to move the motion.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Committee Report on the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management 2015 Annual Report, which was tabled on 7th March, 2018.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion in reference to the Committee Review Report on the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management 2015 Annual Report.

Madam Speaker, the statutory functions of the Ministry are those of the National Disaster Management Office as supported by the 1995 National Disaster Management Plan and the National Disaster Management Act 1998 covering disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, emergency operations, relief and rehabilitation. Other ancillary services include the registration of birth, deaths and marriages, issuance of all licences and correction of licences and permit fees.

Madam Speaker, the Committee noted with interest that all Divisions continue to promote equal opportunities of success to basic services through the implementation of the following Programmes:

1. Self-help Scheme;
2. Non-cane Access Road Scheme;
3. Development Boat Project Scheme;
4. Rural Housing Assistance Scheme;
5. Poverty Alleviation Housing Assistance;
6. Public Sector Investment Programme; and
7. Ancillary Services.

Madam Speaker, the Committee also noted that one of the greatest challenges faced by the Ministry was transportation of materials, machinery, skilled labourers and getting contractors to maritime zones to complete the projects on time.

Despite the challenges of being a large organisation located in the 14 Provinces across the country, the overall performance of the Ministry in 2015 was laudable but for the Ministry to further enhance on the service delivery, the Committee identified a few issues and recommendations for considerations. With those few comments, Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite comments from Honourable Members, if any. Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to make a brief comment. Madam Speaker, firstly I want to talk on the safety of the maritime areas. We need good shipping services and for that, we need those who run that to have good training of Captain and Engineers to run those ships, and the concern that I wish to raise now is in relation to the content of the Fiji Maritime Academy. It does not have properly qualified people, it does not have the right thing and this observation has come about from the Fiji Islands Maritime & Safety Authority (FIMSA). The personnel from this institution periodically inspect the courses at the Fiji Maritime Academy and in the latest report that has come about in March of this year, it was found and if I may quote:

“The sad state of affairs there is that the young generation of engineers have been fraudulently deceived of their hard earned dollars for so long because Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) is not delivering on their promises but only interested in making money.”

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You read through the Report?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will come to that. And three reasons were given: firstly, it sighted

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is a point of order regarding clarification. We understand that we are supposed to be talking on the report itself. The Honourable Member is talking about some reports on the Maritime Academy which is not in this report, Madam Speaker. This report is on the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, but nothing to do with IMO or MSAF certification of the Maritime Academy.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I have explained of the need for their safety and to have that safety, you must have proper training on those who man those shipping lanes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is what I am talking about.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is relevant.
(Chorus of interjection)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes. May I continue, please, Madam Speaker?

HON. SPEAKER.- You have 20 minutes of freedom of speech.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, I have 20 minutes. So just listen.

Firstly, they found out a person, a lecturer (I will not tell the name) suffice to say that he is from Sri Lanka, who provides the syllabus that clearly indicates that he has no engineering experience, and that he has not sailed since 1980.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Where are you reading from?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am reading from the observation of the content of this training institution. The training institution is not good enough.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Just listen, I have been given the time.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will table this after this, Madam Speaker.

The second observation is that two other lecturers (and I will not tell their names) are still teaching the roll valve turning diagram, there is no engine like that in the whole world. This has been taught to our children, and one of the students set twice for the same unit so this person has recommended to stop the engineering course of FMA until the problem is rectified. May I table this, Madam Speaker?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Please, look into it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And I hope the Honourable Minister will look into it.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- No.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- If not, we will a move a motion here.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We move the motion here to take him to task for not looking after this area.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members? In our website. Thank you.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Oh!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I have not finished, Madam Speaker, that is part of it. Now, I will go to the Report so you can sit down. Of course, Madam Speaker, the Committee looks at two things:

1. The Annual Report for 2015; and also
2. The Audit Report for 2015.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- This Report is not part of this Annual Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- They look at this, then they make their recommendation. They look at this - maybe you are afraid.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- They are two different documents.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are afraid, and on the Annual Report, Madam Speaker

HON. SPEAKER.- If you can just clarify the linkage between those reports to the report that you have ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes. It is an Audited Report.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Annual Report and the Audited Report are different reports altogether.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, whatever, let me see the Annual Report for 2015, you are happy now?

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- You have been absent from Parliament for a long time

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Are you happy? I have two comments to make here, Madam Speaker:

- In relation to Rural Housing Assistance. I am asking the Government to look into the Budgetary allocation in relation to this. I think, compared to the whole Housing budgetary allocation in a year, 10 percent is allocated to the rural. I think that is very, very small because they comprise 43 percent of the population.
- I am also asking the Government to please look at regulating the housing types. The same concern that was raised by Honourable Gavoka because the structures of the housing in rural areas and the villages leave a lot to be desired. It is totally different from here and they are prone to cyclones.

Those are my two comments in relation to that, and allow me to make some comments on the Audited Reports for 2015.

There are eight items that were highlighted by the Auditor for comments. These audited reports are intended for you to learn from. This all happened this year so that it does not happen again. So, you come here and make a song and dance of the good things that you do, but these are the bad things and we have to do a balance. It takes away your pride, you should not be proud all the time because we make mistakes and the mistakes are made here.

In relation to the write-off of receivable and trust accounts; what do they say? The auditor says “poor reconciliation and lack of monitoring has resulted in unreconciled variation being carried forward from previous years. So they have not learned from the mistakes of previous years. That is basically what the auditor is saying. So, I hope the Honourable Minister is listening in relation to that.

The Board of Survey Reports not provided this year; what did the auditor find? The above issue was highlighted to the Ministry last year. However, the Ministry failed to implement the audit's recommendation, so it is repeating it. It is good that I am here to remind the Honourable Minister to, please, take to task his staff, so this mistake does not happen again.

Unsubstantiated Expenditure (Main Trust Account): What did the auditor say? Auditor could not substantiate expenditures totalling \$144,000, as the Ministry did not produce the relevant records required for audit review.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-Where is the report?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is the basis of that report, just listen?

Long Outstanding Project Deposits in the Trust Account. What did the audit see? The auditor's finding indicate a lack of proper monitoring of projects and associated project funds. Poor implementation on anomalies for self-help projects. What did the auditor find?

Monitoring an evaluation ought to be conducted by respective board management at the following four levels - committee, provincial and district level. These were not done for a number of areas and it says: "In the absence of Completion Certificate, there is a risk that the project may not be surveyed." In this case, they paid the money already without the Completion Certificate being done. Please, do not repeat that. That is all I am asking. I am not asking too much. Just ask your staff, please, do not do this so that come the audit, it is properly audited.

Non-issuance of Purchase Order for Emergency Water Supply. What did the auditor find? The auditor noted that the Ministry did not issue LPOs for the following companies for carting of emergency water to the various rural settlements.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is part of this.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member had done a similar subject of discussions during a previous sitting, and you had told him that he is restricted to this report and he was disallowed from speaking in that respect.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That audited report is part of this.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is not.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, our role in the Opposition is simply to make you do your work. We cannot do anything here.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I still have the point of order, Madam Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We are only here to help you do your work, to be transparent and accountable and that is what I am doing, that is all I am doing. Next - let us move on.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.-You want to go home? Let us move on, please.

Payment made for incomplete non cane access road.

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, he is actually misleading Parliament. He is bringing in the report of audit which is not even discussed in this report. That should have been discussed in the audit report when the audit committee sits, not in this Parliament. He is misleading Parliament.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Annual account and the Auditor's Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Please, correct me, if I am wrong. He is bringing up issues on this Report and looking at it against some of the comments made in the Audit Report.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, it is not even written in this report. The points that he is bringing up are not even written in this Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Just let me continue.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Rural Housing Assistance - delay in construction.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- He is misleading the House, I can tell you that, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Are the issues not mentioned in this Report?

HON. GOVT MEMBERS.- No.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Precisely, Madam Speaker, two things

HON. SPEAKER.- ... the Report and he is commenting from the Auditor's Report on the issues mentioned on this Report.

HON. GOVT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. SPEAKER.- If it is not, then you are misleading Parliament.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You made the ruling, Madam Speaker. Please, sit down, respect the ruling.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me continue, only one left.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the first point is, we are debating the Annual Report of the Ministry. The accounts go to the Public Accounts Committee. That is what he is referring to.

Secondly, if there has been a precedent in this House, when we were discussing an Annual Report and he started doing the same thing and you ruled at that time that he needs to limit his discussions, what he is talking about regarding the Report that we were discussing. You have already made that ruling. I do not know whether it was this month or last month, so there is a precedent that has already been made. Those are the two specific points that I wish to make. One, that he is talking about something which should have been discussed by the Public Accounts Committee, not in this Report, and there is a precedent that you have made in this case.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I have my advices and they have mentioned that you really need to move on the motion that is being debated, and that is the 2015 Annual Report of the Maritime Development and National Disaster Management motion and therefore, I will terminate your time.

I invite more comments. Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, perhaps it is important to note that when we charge a Committee to scrutinise a report, the Committee has all the latitude to talk to anyone or consider any information that is relevant to the Report. That is in the Committee and even in this House, the latitude, Madam Speaker, is there so you do not restrict the dialogue to only what is in the Report.

Madam Speaker, if you look at our Economic Affairs Report we talk to a number of people. There are some in this House that say, “Why are you talking to that person?” The latitude is there, given to the Committee to decide on how to scrutinise the Report in its entirety. Even this, when it comes into Parliament, part of the reception from the House, Madam Speaker, we do not have to confine our dialogue to the Report. The Committee is an arm of Parliament. Parliament can also go outside the Committee to talk on the issues that are relevant to the Report. That is what we have here today, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have any other comments?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, seeing that we are now opening it up to discussions to what can be talked about and what cannot be talked about, the Honourable Member fails or forgets (I should say) that we have a specialised Committee, which is called the Public Accounts Committee.

The Public Accounts Committee’s job is to actually assess the Report of the Auditor-General, this is the Annual Report of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management. The Standing Committee then has the Report on it, yes, Honourable Gavoka is absolutely correct when they are going through this Annual Report they can call whoever they like. And based on the Annual Report, they come up with their Report but, Madam Speaker, if we were to closely scrutinise this, as part of the Annual Report, they have the audited financial accounts of this particular Ministry but, Madam Speaker, it is not part of the Auditor-General’s Report on this Ministry which is a separate document that is tabled in Parliament separately, that is the point, Madam Speaker.

And what Honourable Nawaikula is doing, is reading from the Report of the Auditor-General, specific what he is reading, you will not find in this Annual Report even though the accounts are here, it is not here, that is the point, Madam Speaker. That is a specialised report and he has the full right, Madam Speaker, to say whatever he likes when we are actually going to debate the Auditor-General’s Report, which has gone to the Public Accounts Committee then they give their report and in the context of discussing that Report, they can bring about whatever they like pertaining to the

accounts and point out the anomalies. That is the point, Madam Speaker. No one is denying his right but, please, I know they are not used to following processes, they say whatever they like, whatever comes out of their head, but we need to follow a process, because then you can actually have a constructive debate. I mean most of the Honourable Members over there when Honourable Nawaikula is talking they were having a big laugh, they think it is a joke.

HON. MEMBER.- It is not a joke.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They all think it is a joke. They were giggling and laughing away because they think what he is doing is some kind of entertainment. Madam Speaker, we need to look at the process and, Madam Speaker, as he clearly highlighted this is the Report. This is the Annual Report, the Annual Report does not have the observations or the detailed observations of the Auditor-General, it does not, it is simply the accounts. So in that way, let us have it contained to this, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The anomaly has been clarified and I had terminated his input based on the anomalies that have been mentioned, and therefore, we will move on.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam, I am not going to debate the process but I wish to contribute to the Report, am I allowed, Madam Speaker? I want to speak on the report.

HON. SPEAKER.- The time you took previously has been taken into consideration. Thank you for your comments on that, you can now have the floor.

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

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I think we have one Speaker here. Can we just have one Speaker and make the ruling, please? Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wish to make some commentaries on this, Madam Speaker, on the recommendation, “The Ministry must strengthen their systems and processes for a more effective and efficient service delivery to the rural areas and maritime islands.” And then in the conclusion they say, “The Ministry continues to deal with the challenges of being a large organisation, located in the 14 provinces around the country.” The Deputy Chairman spoke on the rehabilitation work of the organisation and, Madam Speaker, if I can just question that on how the systems are working and how strong are these 14 units in the 14 provinces, even the experience that I related today in Nadi.

As you know from last night, people came from all over Nadi and camped at the Prince Charles Park expecting rehabilitation the next day, with the money and the like, for the Cyclone Assistance Relief Effort (CARE) programme, and this morning, there were 5,000 of them in Nadi today. This morning, the officers came and told them, “It is not happening, come back another time.”

So it begs the question on this observation, what the system is like. You highlighted the system here and you were also saying that you will strengthen the 14 provinces. Madam Speaker, on the scale that we see today in terms of this rehabilitation and the CARE in its various forms, how strong are those 14 units in those provinces?

In Nadroga, over the last two days, I believe as indicated by the Honourable Minister today was because the Nadroga numbers was just huge, they just could not cope. So, one would ask the

question, how is the mobilisation of the resources when you have something on the scale, I mean your favourite word, what is it - “Unprecedented”?

HON. MEMBER.- Unprecedented.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, we hear that all the time. I mean this is “unprecedented” and you could not cope. You could not cope, so really, Madam Speaker, the observations made here should have been noted by the FijiFirst Government and to make sure that our people did not suffer the way they suffered this morning in Nadi. In Nadroga, I think they went up to 9.00 p.m., at night.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So you see, this thing starts at 4.00 a.m.

That is the magnitude of the challenge which the system highlighted here is failing to meet, and you know, what is happening here, Madam Speaker, are those units running the show or is it an opportunity for FijiFirst to go in politics? I mean, you know

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We were accommodating them in Nadi this morning.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Your numbers are depleted, where are you?

So, Madam Speaker, these are issues that should be noted in terms of this report, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister has been pleading with people to be honest. Honourable Salote Radrodro related a case where one family, three people claimed a thousand dollars each. So the recipients are being threatened that they will be prosecuted. If you go back to the Agricultural scam which these people tend to highlight time and again. The prosecution was on the administrators, not on the recipients. Do you remember that, Madam Speaker?

HON. MEMBER.- Yes.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So, why are you threatening the people? Why do you not threaten the administrators; the people who you have set up to provide the services which you say here, have developed systems to look after these types of disasters. So, Madam Speaker, you know, we live in two worlds in this country. We just debated about that cultural thing and all that. You know the real world that we live in, SODELPA and NFP, and the make belief world that FijiFirst believes in. Yes, make belief.

(Chorus of interjections)

You all say that it is all hunky-dory in there.

(Chorus of interjections)

You all say it is hunky-dory in there, we are sitting on this side of the House, if you look at how poor they are, when I am recognising my colleagues in here from NFP, they are already jumping to conclusion. Listen guys, let me, Madam Speaker, end with this.

Last week, the phones were ringing non-stop. People were queuing up in Lautoka, you know what is happening in Fiji, today? Any small queue, people will go and join. Then they would ask,

“What are we doing here? They are all queuing up for the freebies that have been promised by FijiFirst.

(Chorus of interjections)

And they called us, and we said, “Look, we do not have any powers over this. You can talk to such and such and such and such”, and people were really upset. Some of them do not qualify, and we asked them, “Hey, you do not qualify, what are you doing there?” Do you know what they said? “Oh, just go and try our luck. Just go and try our luck, take advantage of this because we know, the next Government will not give us this.” So, what does that say, Madam Speaker? The people who are lining up already know that there is going to be a new Government. Yes, I tried to process what they said.

(Chorus of interjections)

We want to go and try our luck because we will not get it from the next government. Already the people are saying that this Government is going out, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I might as well read it. Standing Order 61, “when speaking, Members must confine their observation to the subject under consideration.” The Honourable Member is talking about the programme of Home CARE being done by the Ministry of Social Welfare. We are now talking about the Annual Report for the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management. If you continue down this track, if anyone stands up, I can talk about putting a man on the moon and I can say that that is relevant, if you continue on this track.

HON. SPEAKER.- The man on the moon is unrelated to this Report.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Anyway, thank you, your points are noted. Any other comments from Members? Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you Honourable Minister for the opportunity to speak first. Honourable Speaker, we will note that this Ministry is Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, and I believe almost half of our population live in the rural and maritime areas. Also, this is the Ministry that should be dealing with National Disaster Management and I believe the comments by Honourable Viliame Gavoka was linked to the core role as mandated by the portfolio in this Ministry, that is supposed to be dealing with National Disaster Management as opposed to Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Madam Speaker, in the review findings of this Report, it states that the budget for 2015 was reduced by \$7.6 million and that is a huge amount, Madam Speaker, for a Ministry such as this Ministry that has been mandated to look after our rural and maritime areas, to have that kind of budget cut and then we ask what all are the projects that will not be achieved because of the reduction in the budget? Madam Speaker, also, we noted that also in the findings that the challenges faced by these maritime and rural areas is the transportation of materials, machinery, skilled labours to be able to complete the projects in the various maritime and rural areas. There is also this tendency that when there is a shortage of funds for projects in one of the divisions, for instance in this case, there was a project in Kubulau, Bua which could not be completed because of financial constraints, they had to vire from the budgetary allocation for projects that had been

earmarked for the Eastern Division and because that happened, the Eastern Division projects were not implemented. They were not achieved because of the transfer of funds to complete the projects in Kubulau, Bua.

We then raised a question, if the projects face financial constraints then why not access funding under Head 50, rather than using up the funds that have been earmarked for certain projects in other division and in that way, it further undermines the development of maritime and rural areas, Madam Speaker.

Also the Ministry really needs to strengthen their systems and processes to be able to implement a more effective and efficient service delivery to the maritime areas. They need to know the boat programmes, they need to network with other ministries and departments to be able to help them, particularly so when their budgetary allocation has been drastically reduced in the 2015 budgetary allocation, Madam Speaker. That is my short contribution to the Report debate. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister Inia Seruiratu.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, let me just assure this Honourable House that the three recommendations in the Report have been taken seriously by the Ministry and, of course, the Permanent Secretary and his Management are working on it and those three recommendation are on our reporting systems and templates which they are standardising now through the Senior Management Board and one is on processes and this is part of the Civil Service Reform and, of course, they are also working on it.

Of course, on the gender issues, Madam Speaker, we have about 36 percent of our staff currently are females. So, again we are just very briefly taking this recommendation seriously and we are working on it. Just to clarify a few issues raised by the Honourable Members on the other side, Madam Speaker, again, in my Ministerial assignment, I do not have the Maritime Academy under me, Madam Speaker. I do not see any relevance at all as to why the Maritime Academy was brought in as part of the discussions this afternoon because this is specifically about the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, and has nothing to do at all with the Maritime Academy, Madam Speaker.

On Maritime Safety, anyway and, of course, on the concern raised by the Honourable Salote Radrodro, this is again a Government that cares about the people in the maritime communities - why the reduction in the Budget of \$7.6 million? Let me state before this honourable House that we cared so much, the Ministry cared so much about the people in the maritime islands. Madam Speaker, in the previous years' Budgets, we asked for a vessel for the Ministry and that vessel is currently under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport the Cagivou, Madam Speaker, to provide services and, of course, address the safety of the maritime communities.

So to complete the vessel cost, Madam Speaker, the following year, about \$3 million or whatever was allocated to the Ministry. It was decided then during the Budget consultations by the Ministry and the Ministry for Economy that it is best that that ship is moved to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport because Government Shipping Services is under the Ministry. So, Madam Speaker, that clearly tells the Honourable Members on the other side that we are concerned about the rural communities, particularly those in the maritime islands and, of course, their safety as well.

When was the last boat in the Government Shipping Services under the previous Governments built? When, Madam Speaker? There was no purchase of any but we have purchased the *Iloilovatu*, *Cagivou*, *Rogovoka*, Madam Speaker, and of course, there is another one

coming now with the state-of-the-art hospital inside. It will be a mobile hospital to service the maritime islands, Madam Speaker. That is why the reduction in the \$7.6 million we initially ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You need to read.

HON. COL. LT. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... asked for this boat, Madam Speaker, and then it was transferred. The maritime community is high in our priority, Madam Speaker, and of course the same thing with the safety of our rural communities. Madam Speaker, again on building codes in the rural communities development is partnership, that has always been from the beginning and it will always be the case, Madam Speaker.

All the Evacuation Centres that Government constructs is built to safety, but however, Madam Speaker, all the Honourable Members on the other side would also know that there are some Evacuation Centres that are funded by the communities themselves, and this is where the worry lies, Madam Speaker. Government now is also looking at retrofitting to address those that were not built to standard. But those including rural housing under the Rural Housing Scheme are built to standard, Madam Speaker, because the safety of our people is everyone's concern and every responsible Government will do it accordingly, Madam Speaker. But let me just go back to the Report, we are doing our best to address all these, Madam Speaker, and of course, there will be continued improvements in the Ministry. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, just a few comments. The Honourable Nawaikula talked about the Maritime Academy and he held up a letter written by one individual who is about to retire who probably wants to retain his job, that is why he has written his letter and he has provided no basis.

But just for the information of Parliament, Madam Speaker, the certification of the Maritime Academy, of course, Madam Speaker, is done through MSAF under the IMO Standards. The IMO Standards has certain particular requirements, not just in terms of the qualification of lecturers, but also in terms of the syllabus, the course material, the actual environment through which they operate, that is given by the certification not by some individual who he probably knows and probably has written this letter, Madam Speaker. Even if you read the letter, the way it is written it actually has got no credibility. We have constant meetings with them. In fact, the Honourable Nawaikula should probably highlight what actually happened to the Maritime School prior to this Academy being set up. It was in terrible conditions.

(Hon. N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Terrible condition, Madam Speaker. Maybe you are talking about 1970s, we are not talking about 1970s, we are talking about prior to what had happened, it was in shambles.

There are many courses today that are actually certified by IMO that were not certified by IMO and, in fact, that was the dilemma. And here we have a maritime nation with maritime academy or maritime school had lost almost all the certification with IMO. We actually rebuilt it and we are getting more certification and more courses are getting certification by IMO. In fact, we have sent people from MSAF to the Colombo International Nautical and Engineering College (CINEC) Facility to see how things are run. So again, Madam Speaker, you will see that they are targeting something with some ordinary person or one individual I should say, has written it, he has highlighted bits there, absolutely no credibility to it. What he should be getting if he were to hold

up any report, get an IMO report, that has credibility, that has third party validation or lack of validation.

Madam Speaker, we had all sorts of shenanigans. I think they kind of feel a bit aggrieved by what has happened over the past three or four days. I think they have absolutely, Madam Speaker, in terms of their input has been quite pedestrian in the past three or four days in trying to gain some kind of credibility by making all sorts of comments. Honourable Nawaikula knew completely that the truth came out on Fiji Pine. So, today he is trying to get audit reports, trying to gain some form of credibility, Madam Speaker, no credibility whatsoever.

Honourable Gavoka talking about Nadi, saying there is a long queue and, therefore, the system is not working, what a preposterous notion, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when you have a particular day dedicated and you have literally thousands of people turning up, obviously, a just solution will need to be made. There was no chaos as such, it is just that a lot of people have turned up. We had all the teams there, he should be thankful for the civil servants who actually worked till 4.00 a.m or 5.00 a.m. this morning, since 9.00 a.m. yesterday morning.

HON. OPP. MEMBER.- Poor planning.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nearly 24 hours, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, you see what a superfluous comment! Madam Speaker, when you actually ask people to come and queue up if they want assistance, how do we know how many people turned up? But because we knew, Madam Speaker, it was open, they got all the teams as far as the welfare.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, a point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The Honourable Minister is speaking outside of the Report and you have ruled that discussions should be concentrated on the Report. He does not have the right of reply.

HON. SPEAKER.- He is talking about National Disaster in

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think the Honourable Radrodro is trying to be cute. His colleague actually mentioned all of this, so I am doing this in response, he did not stand up and object to him. Do you want a response, or what do I do, Madam Speaker?

HON. SPEAKER- You may continue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you. Madam Speaker, I am basically correcting the information or misinformation, I should say, so obviously, there were a lot of people who turned up and we have to ensure therefore that the people in Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, also get served properly. Madam Speaker, Honourable Radrodro, we all know about your planning in the Ministry of Women.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, a lot of thousands of people actually turned up and so they have been addressed but to use one example of something that happened today to cast aspersions on the entire Ministry, is completely inappropriate, and they said they live in the real world, we do not live in the real world, Madam Speaker.

We have done far more things the Honourable Minister has highlighted in respect of the shipping services that have been provided. Honourable Radrodro said, “Oh, \$7 million has been reduced.” You need to look at the budget, where has the money gone? When we did the budget debate, we actually looked at it and told them, “The money is shifting from here to there, and the reason why it has been shifted is because of X, Y, Z”. You simply just stand up and say, “Oh, budget reduction of \$7 million.” This is the level of contribution they are making, Madam Speaker. Who is living in the real world and who is living not in the real world?

Madam Speaker, the reality is, on one hand, we have this Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, National Disaster Management, when we are giving this assistance through CARE Fiji, now they are calling it freebees, then Honourable Gavoka said because they know that the next Government will not give them any freebees. That means the people of Fiji should know if they were to come to Government, God forbid, Madam Speaker, that they will not provide assistance to the ordinary Fijians, that is what he is saying, that they will not provide assistance to ordinary Fijians, that is what they are saying, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, National Disaster Management has an enormous task. We are 320 islands of which 110 are inhabited. Today many of the islands in the rural and the maritime areas should have got the level of services they deserve about 20 years ago.

The Honourable Minister and his team are actually trying to provide the services to them now. Rural electrification, water, solar panels, et cetera, that work is being done. National Disaster Management, better coordination, we are moving the Meteorological Department from Infrastructure to National Disaster Management to have better coordination. This is what this Report, Madam Speaker, is alluding to and talking about. That is what we should be focused on, how we can actually streamline the processes. To come up with all these pedestrian issues, Madam Speaker, is completely unwarranted but I would like to thank the Committee for their Report, Madam Speaker, and we look forward to the Committee assessing their next Report for this particular Ministry. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Deputy Chairperson on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I have no further comments to make.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote to note 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.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, thank you very much for your participation. Thank you very much for keeping us awake in this debate in the last few minutes. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.57 p.m.