

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER, 2018

The Parliament resumed at 9.36 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Monday, 26th November 2018, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to the second sitting day of Parliament for the 2018 to 2019 session.

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

Bell Timings – Responses to HE's Address

I would like to remind all Honourable Members that you have on your tables the bell timings detailing the times for the first bell and then the final bell.

Honourable Members, for the purposes of the responses to His Excellency's Address, Members are allowed to speak for 20 minutes and the first bell will be rung when a Member reaches 18 minutes during his or her speech and the final bell will be rung when it reaches 20 minutes for conclusion.

Honourable Members please kindly note that we will adhere to all those timelines.

Voting

On another matter Honourable Members, when the vote is opened, the three lights will be blinking. Once you select your choice, please check that only that light should be on or constant and the other two lights will automatically switch off. Should you wish to change your vote whilst the vote is still open, you may do so. Once the vote is closed, you cannot change your vote but if you wish to, do not hesitate to inform me immediately.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

POINT OF ORDER

Misleading Statement

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 74(1) to highlight misleading statements made in this Parliament yesterday, 26th November 2018, by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy.

It is my firm and unequivocal belief that the Honourable Attorney-General misled this Parliament while raising points of order against my contribution to the motion for the Adoption of Standing Orders. I have checked both, the Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard and the recording of the proceedings, and both are consistent with what I am saying.

Madam Speaker, during the debate on the motion and well before your ruling, I rose to contribute as follows, and I quote from page 12 of the Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard on Monday, 26th November, 2018:

“I was not going to speak on it, but just listening to Honourable Jone Usamate, I think Honourable Vuniwaqa did the right thing to point out the procedural matters. But just listening to Honourable Jone Usamate, let me remind him, it is not just about the procedure, it is the way in which they amended the Standing Orders in 2016. In fact, they did it without the recommendation of the Standing Order Committee, so we want to point that out, Madam Speaker.”

The Honourable Attorney-General while raising his point of order said, and I also quote from page 12 of the Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard on Monday, 26th November, 2018:

“Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member as usual, is misleading this Parliament. The entire amendments to these Standing Orders went through the committee stage. The Committee Members were present, it came back to this Parliament, and we voted upon it. How can he say we did not have any agreement of Parliament? How can he say we did not have any agreement with the Select Committee on the Standing Orders? This matter is finished. The reality is, the motion is about the Standing Orders, with amendments to it, he is misleading the Parliament, Madam Speaker.”

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No, no, I have not finished, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, but your point of order is clear.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No, Madam Speaker, I need to explain this very carefully because it is important for us to clear this matter in this Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes, your point of order is very clear. We will check on the Daily Hansard report and I will make a ruling after that. But as of now, what you have mentioned is very clear and has given us direction as to what to do.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I wanted to....

HON. SPEAKER.- This is really not....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I wanted to point out exactly...

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please. Thank you very much, you may take your seat. Actually, thank you very much for bringing that up again.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I have not finished my....

HON. SPEAKER.- But the issue is very clear to me right now. We will look at the Daily Hansard Report in detail and I will make my ruling later on. But otherwise, if there is something much more substantive that you want to mention, as you know, it can be brought up as a substantive motion at a later sitting. Right now, thank you very much.

DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Prime Minister to move his motion.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for His most gracious Address.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister to speak on his motion.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Let me be the first to say that I fully embrace this challenge to all of us, that we work together irrespective of political party, to serve the best interests of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, it is a great honour for me to make my maiden speech as the Prime Minister, having led the FijiFirst Party to another victory in our General Elections.

On the subject of victory, Madam Speaker, let us all kick off this new session by giving a big *vinaka vakalevu* to our Flying Fijians and Head Coach, John McKee, for their remarkable upset win over France this past weekend.

(Applause)

Our first-ever victory over the French, Madam Speaker, one of the most dominant forces in World Rugby. To John McKee and his Flying Fijians, you are making your mark on 15s Rugby, establishing a new era of greatness of your own, and with the World Cup around the corner, we certainly have a lot to look forward to in 2019.

And I also want to, Madam Speaker, give a big congratulations to our *Fiji Airways Fijiana* for their dominant performance at the Oceania Rugby Championship, where they defended their title with another first place victory

(Applause)

Madam Speaker allow me to congratulate you on your re-election. You have been measured impartial and a fair leader in this august Chamber throughout the past four years and I know I speak for all of us Members of this Parliament when I say how grateful we are to see you continue in your role. And you can again expect Government's full cooperation in this Chamber in the official conduct of the Parliament's affairs.

The Fijian people are lucky to have a woman of your wisdom and grace at the podium and as thousands tune into their televisions, on radio, online, and over social media to watch Parliament, your voice and guidance are helping inform a new, better, educated, and civically engaged nation. Through your work, you are inspiring young Fijian girls all around the country, knowing that they can one day be the ones to lead the way in shaping our great Fijian future.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That is why, Madam Speaker, I full-heartedly echo the pride voiced by His Excellency the President over the increased number of women represented in this Parliament. It would be foolish to claim that we have yet achieved equitable representation for women among our membership, or in Fijian society at large, as there remain a considerable amount of work to be done to empower women leaders in this country, but progress has been made and that progress must be celebrated regardless of political party.

So I welcome back the Honourable Rosy Akbar, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar (who will serve as your Deputy Speaker), the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa and Honourable Salote Radrodro. I give first warm welcome to Honourable Premila Kumar, Honourable Selai Adimaitoga and the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. Madam Speaker, my wife, Mary, has also asked me to extend a special welcome to the women of Kadavu who are now represented in Parliament; the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and Honourable Lynda Tabuya.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank all Fijians for granting me the privilege to serve them for another term as their Prime Minister. I speak for all the members of FijiFirst when I say that we are grateful for their trust, their confidence, and their support as we continue the efforts to take our nation forward. No one is more experienced with carrying that weight of the tremendous responsibility than our Government and I wish to assure the Fijian people that I will never rest in my efforts to serve our nation, to move Fiji forward and to lead a Government that sets an example for integrity, decency, transparency and respect for all Fijians.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The re-election of the FijiFirst Government is a victory but not for me personally, or for my party. It is a victory, Madam Speaker, for Fiji; for our continued development as a nation, for our common and equal citizenry, and for the sacred promise of equality in our society. That is what FijiFirst has always stood for and that is what the Fijian people have chosen. I wish to reassure them that they have put their trust in proven leadership. They have placed their faith in our unity and togetherness and they have rejected the politics of fear and division.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- They have chosen to keep Fiji on the great path of progress, chartered by this Government. They have chosen to keep our economy strong and growing and they have

chosen to welcome new and better opportunities. They have chosen to keep Fiji a leader among nations, a country on the frontlines fighting for the causes that matter most to our people; our culture, our way of life, and our security for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, as I re-enter this Parliament, I recall the swell of pride and patriotism I felt back in 2014 when we first returned to this Chamber to mark the start of our new and genuine parliamentary democracy. I share the sentiment expressed by His Excellency, that those feelings within me have not been diminished as the years have passed. In fact, since that time four years ago, my pride has only intensified, my commitment has only strengthened, my sense of duty has only grown more profound, as I remain ready and committed as ever to continuing the work of this august Parliament.

Madam Speaker, it is one thing to deliver the foundation for a new democracy, to introduce a new Constitution, to establish strong institutions and form a strong government, but it is quite another to ensure that achievement endures the inevitable and vigorous test of time. And by successfully holding our second genuine parliamentary Elections, we have solidified the historic achievement of our new democracy under the 2013 Fijian Constitution. That is the victory shared by all of us as representatives of our people and by every Fijian.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who cast their votes in our Election, despite the heavy rains we saw on the polling day. I thank all those Fijians who supported my Government at the polls, as I thank all those who did not because by voting they have fulfilled their civic duty as Fijians and patriotic citizens of our country, and I assure you we have heard you.

I am here to serve you as Prime Minister. I am here to listen to you and take your concerns seriously. I am here to bring the change our nation needs to confront the challenges on the horizon. And I am here to build a better future for all Fijians, wherever they may be in the country.

Madam Speaker, the basic tenets of the FijiFirst Government's leadership shall remain steadfastly in place of our next term in Government. Our leadership will remain principled, transparent and accountable. In every decision in every action we take, our chief consideration will remain the wellbeing of the Fijian people, all of our people, not only some communities, not only some types of people from certain types of background, not only people from certain provinces but for all our people.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That unbreakable assurance from my Government is the first for Fiji, and I believe that level of commitment remains the only true path to an inclusive and equitable Fijian society.

We shall maintain our steady, consistent and responsible financial management of our economy, and we shall strive to keep our economy on its record course of development, building on our historic nine consecutive years of economic growth. We will continue to spread the benefits of our prosperity as widely as possible by delivering innovative, forward-thinking development in our cities, towns and in communities placed in even the most rural and maritime regions of the country.

We shall continue to expand access to critical services, such as our network of roads, water, electricity and telecommunications, including the new free wi-fi hotspots we have launched across the country, and we will continue to make Governments services more available and simpler for Fijians to use and understand.

We shall continue to deliver new and better infrastructure, built to a quality that can withstand the ever-increasing frequency of cyclones which are striking our country year after year.

We shall continue to protect the communal ownership of *i Taukei* land in this country. Zero *i Taukei* land has been lost through the entirety of my leadership as Prime Minister, and I am the only leader and Minister in this room, Madam Speaker, who can claim such a record.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Honourable Prime Minister is awaiting a chance to continue. Can you, please, give him the opportunity?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you.

Madam Speaker, our record in that regard will remain untarnished in the years to come as we find new ways to, not only protect and preserve *i Taukei* land but continue to help landowners tap into its full economic potential with a full offering of development assistance, from planning to grants and to construction. I challenge everyone in this Chamber to recognise that false fear-mongering about land loss tears countries apart, limits economic potential and pulls us all down.

We should continue to make strategic investments in our economy, investments that are specifically designed to make life easier, better and more affordable for all Fijian families by growing what we call 'social wages' in Fiji. That includes:

- free water and subsidised electricity;
- our historic achievement of making education free;
- subsidising transportation to school;
- providing free textbooks; as well as
- allocating massive new funding towards tertiary loans and scholarships, led by our most recent billion-dollar allocation towards the Fijian Education System.

That, Madam Speaker, includes the comprehensive package of family assistance that we launched this financial year, the:

- expanded Maternity Leave;
- introduction of Paternity Leave;
- Family Care Leave; and
- parenthood assistance payments to new mothers on the birth of a child.

We are not only reducing the cost burden on Fijian families, but we are actually putting more money in their pockets.

Already, Madam Speaker, we have lowered VAT across the board to 9 percent and freed Fijians who earn under \$30,000 a year from paying any income tax at all. And we will continue to raise the spending power of Fijians everywhere by maintaining a stable and competitive marketplace and by pursuing policies that build confidence in our economy, attract investment, create new employment and reduce the cost of living for our citizens.

We shall continue to take the lead in instilling merit-based practices in Fijian society, not only by continuing with our reforms of the Fijian Civil Service and implementing the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS), but by working with the private sector and civil society to cultivate a culture that rewards excellence and achievement and that opens new doors of opportunity for all Fijians, regardless of who they are, their gender, where they come from in Fiji, who their parents may be, their ethnic background, or the religion they follow.

Particularly, Madam Speaker, we will listen, learn and work to empower the young people of this country, and that is the work that I dearly hope sees the endorsement of every Member of this august House.

Madam Speaker, while our Party name, FijiFirst, speaks to our number one priority, putting the people of Fiji first in everything we do, our spirit of Fijian fortitude and foresight continues to help shape a brighter economic future for all humankind.

This vision of a better future has, for the first time in Fiji's history, expanded far, far beyond our own borders. Like my good friend, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has said, "Fiji is kicking butt on the global stage", working hand in hand with some of the world's most influential and powerful Presidents and Prime Ministers, business executives and owners of multibillion dollar companies and Non-Government Organisations that shape the way humankind will move forward together.

Next month, I will hand over the Presidency of the UN Climate Change Negotiation to Poland at COP 24. I will do so with a great deal of pride in what we, together, have accomplished during the Fijian Presidency of COP 23. Our leadership has gathered global momentum that spans States, local and national governments, businesses, civil societies, all the way to individual citizens, all united in the cause for climate action.

We have shown the power of our perspective, that of a vulnerable small island nation in driving real tangible progress on a global scale. And Fiji will not take backseat in that campaign at the conclusion of our Presidency, we will continue to speak loudly and clearly on what we know is necessary to stave off climate catastrophe for our planet.

Our successful COP 23 Presidency, Madam Speaker, follows our previous co-hosting of the first-ever UN Ocean Conference. Together, our leadership on these issues has shown that Fiji is standing shoulder to shoulder with the Goliaths of the world to prove that our voice, our stories, and our leadership is that of a nation of "Davids"; a proud nation that can take on even the mightiest of enemies.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I will soon leave for London, Madam Speaker, for a high level engagement both, the COP 23 Talanoa Session and the International Sugar Organisation, two events that speak directly to my fight to protect Fijians' existing ways of life while mapping out how we prepare Fijians for a changing economy, a changing global market, and a changing climate.

Indeed, from Fiji's Chairmanship of the G77 Plus China, to our role as President of the United Nations General Assembly, to our co-chairing of the United Nations Oceans Conference, to our more recent leadership as the Chair of the World Bank Small States Forum, Chair of Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, and our becoming the first-ever Pacific Island country elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council, are all leadership roles were once unthinkable for Fiji ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

(Acclamation)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ...and they are proof, Madam Speaker, of the fact that Fiji's star is continuing to rise to new heights. This new Fiji, one of worldwide prominence is undeniable. It is remarkable and it will benefit every Fijian for generations to come, not only those on the other side of the Chamber.

Madam Speaker, because the world sees us for what we truly are and as the Fijian brand raises and our reputation echoes far and wide, each and every citizen of this changed nation will reap the rewards. To every Fijian and to the world, I can proudly say that the Fiji of *coups* and chaos is no more. The Fiji of:

- stability;
- equality;
- healthy employee and employer relationships;
- business growth and investment;
- adherence to high international standards, practices and law;
- regional and global leadership;

that is the Fiji which our children and grandchildren will inherit.

Madam Speaker, I will always put my trust in the common sense of ordinary Fijians. I trust that most people will believe their own eyes over the words of politicians, I trust that they want action, not talk and fancy speeches and, once again, my unwavering trust in the decency and practicality of the Fijian spirit has been rewarded with this victory.

Now that we are in Parliament, Madam Speaker, we must never forget that when we all share a country, we share more than a spot of land on the earth. We share a destiny and a love for our nation and each other.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We must remember that we are together in the struggle to build a nation that is more just, more caring and more prosperous every day.

Madam Speaker, I thank the Almighty God for his continued blessings for Fiji and the Fijian people. I also thank my wife, Mary, who has been my rock during this campaign and my entire service as Prime Minister. She is my greatest friend, my most trusted confidante, and my wisest counsellor. I want to thank her for her endless love and her support through our past term in Government and on the campaign trail by my side.

I also thank my children and all my 18 grandchildren for always keeping a smile on my face, and for being my constant source of joy, my proudest achievement and my greatest blessing in life.

When I look into the eyes of my children and grandchildren, Madam Speaker, I see the aspirations of every Fijian, and the life we will promise to Fijians who are not yet born. And I will continue to give every ounce of my effort to build a better Fiji for you, for your families and for every Fijian, no matter where they live.

May God bless Fiji and God bless the Fijian people. Thank you, *Vinaka Vakalevu*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Before we proceed, I wish to remind Honourable Members that we will closely follow the Batting Order that has been distributed. I now call upon the Honourable Selai Adimaitoga to take the floor.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; this is a very special moment for me to stand in this august House where national affairs are decided upon.

Madam Speaker, I pledge to serve my country and its people to the best of my ability as a Member of Parliament as a FijiFirst representative under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister. Indeed, I would not have had the remarkable opportunity had it not been for the revolution led by the Honourable Prime Minister over the course of the last 12 years. During one of our nation's darkest periods, the Honourable Prime Minister emerged with the vision as well as the strength and determination to steer Fiji towards genuine democracy, prosperity, stability and certainty.

Of course, I would also like to convey my humble heartfelt sincere thanks to:

- My husband - Lekima Waqawai, and parent - Seremaia Naimawi;
- Mr. Hirdesh, son and family from Vuqele and the Vuqele Community;
- Mr. Amresh and family, especially his son;
- Malele Communities - Malele 1, 2 and 3;
- Sima and family;
- Mr. Kamlesh and family from Druamasi Community;
- the whole of Nadelei Village and Waikubukububu Village; and
- Vatubo and Yadonu families.

My condolences to the family of my uncle-in-law who passed away, the late Mr. Nasaqa family, who were very strong supporters of FijiFirst. His last words to me were, "thank you and goodbye". To his family, I will hold that within my heart, a very supportive family member who cherished FijiFirst as the best.

To Mr. Seru Tuva and family; Balata communities; Mr. and Mrs. Ali; Irene and family; Yaladro community; Mr. China and family; Sharma and family Rakavidi; all the families in Davota; Mr. Imtiaz and family; Wainivoce community; Yasiyasi community; Tagitagi Vatutavui community; Mr. Asish; Mr. Abdul and Mr. Abraham; Leone; my family – Senidamanu; Mr. and Mrs. Sai Momoivalu (Toka, Sai and Sai's mum); Mr. and Mrs. Usa; Mr. Bhim; Mr. Mustaq and family; Shop N Save managers and family; Shayal and family and NewWorld staff; Manoj and all who have supported FijiFirst; Mr. Kup and brother Saritari and family; Mr. Semi from Vatukoula; Vili from Nasomo; Nasivi community; market vendors in Tavua; Mr. Degei and family; Yaca and family; Nakanakana from Waikubukubu; and my two sisters in America and Vatutavui Village, I pledge to them my fullest dedication and support.

At this point, I also wish to extend a special thank you to the Honourable Attorney-General who has been my inspiration, who has unwavering confidence in me and who has encouraged me to be very strong and to have a passion for politics to serve all Fijians. Without my leaders, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General, I would not be standing here today.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your re-appointment as the Speaker. We are looking forward to your leadership and guidance as we debate on the nation's affairs and make changes for the benefit of all Fijians.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the President for his inspiring Address at the Opening of Parliament.

Finally I would like to thank the people of Fiji and pledge to you our dedication and service. Our power to change our country comes from your support.

I would also like to thank the thousands of Fijians who voted for FijiFirst and ask those who did not, to join us, to follow truth instead of lies. Madam Speaker, I am very happy to speak on women sugarcane farmers. They are very effective examples of their own communities. Sugarcane farmers like I continue empowering women because FijiFirst values women's rights to access the entitlements and privileges guaranteed under our Constitution unencumbered by discrimination, culture or oppressive religious interpretation.

FijiFirst is creating a gender-fair society that protects and promotes the rights of women. FijiFirst supports the freedom of all women to participate in any profession they choose. Accordingly, policies focus on encouraging shared decision-making relationships, especially as they relate to family planning, child care, economic independence and choices of paid work.

Resources will be provided to women's groups to support income generating projects as in our FijiFirst Manifesto 2018. The National Women's Expo, sponsored by Government, will continue to focus on marketing products produced by women for the local and international markets. Women are key players in the betterment of our beloved nation. I praise and acknowledge the immeasurable participation of women in all areas of life. From women who rise early to care for their families, to those who are the last ones to sleep, your passion to have a better family from home to community is the foundation upon which our nation rests and grows.

Women run our homes and raise our children, they are firstly leaders, teachers at home, they are smart budgeters, great chefs and they are the best judges for everything to be a hundred percent in a family.

Our FijiFirst family is the best. We look beyond gender, we have included many women on merit in the party and that is why I am here today, due to FijiFirst's inclusiveness. I salute our FijiFirst leaders for their far-sightedness in including women in leadership and our never ending roles in this amazing nation that possesses a huge amount of untapped potential and opportunity.

Under FijiFirst, Fiji has progressed a huge amount, things have changed from worse to good, good to best and it is the Fijians who have a vision for what is best that change our future for the better, just like what our leader the Honourable Prime Minister did when he set about modernising Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we are political leaders, we are here to deliver our fellow Fijians the service of alleviating their problems in life and to achieve a more prosperous future, a better standard for all. We all have to work together and achieve this dream by making change through development, not just on the ground but in families, communities and in our mindset.

The world is changing rapidly and as a growing nation we need to be very smart about how we change. We, women, should realise that we are equally as capable as men and not to exercise any power, physical, mental or moral over our brothers but to make our men understand that no one is lower than oneself, this is the moral value of equality.

Madam Speaker, may I also acknowledge and thank His Excellency the President of Fiji for his comprehensive and moving Address on the occasion of Opening the first Session of Parliament on Monday, I quote: Let us dedicate ourselves to the democratic ideal and genuine equality for all Fijians and resolve to work constructively in our new democracy for the benefit of our people."

We came into this world naked and will die naked so my question to all is, is there a coffin big enough to carry the whole world? The answer is, no. So, while we are still alive we must give to others; the more you give, the more you will be blessed. FijiFirst and our Government is being blessed with

giving respect without discrimination and that is the way we should all live - to deliver, to assist so that when we die, we will go in peace knowing that we have left behind a better future for our families.

Unlike other political parties, FijiFirst believes in action, not false promises. We always deliver, we serve, we learn and we grow. FijiFirst has already delivered meaningful change to thousands of Fijians and we will continue to do more for Fijians families.

The honour we will give back to our God because we believe in walking the talk and leading by example. I wish to end my speech of appeal with these fine words. Let us work hand in hand together to advance the national interest and to adhere to highest standards of collective and personal conduct. May God bless us all.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- We now call on the Honourable Rosy Akbar to have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney-General, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament: *Ni sa bula vinaka, asalaam alaykum* and a very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to congratulate you on your re-appointment as the Speaker of Parliament for another term of Parliament. I would also like to congratulate and welcome all other Members of Parliament in this august House after a successful 2018 General Elections.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to put on record my thanks and appreciation for His Excellency's most gracious speech and I am confident that we all will take note of his wisdom and his vision for a united Fiji. Madam Speaker, a special congratulations to all the elected women Members of Parliament and also all the candidates who took part in the 2018 General Elections.

It is heartening to see the number of women now in Parliament, needless to say, we as a nation can still do better. After all, women make up almost half of our population in Fiji and gender balance has to be at the forefront of any responsible nation building exercise. More women in position of power will instil confidence and motivate our lesser fortunate sisters to seek out empowerment opportunities and improve their families positioning.

It is widely accepted that when women become better educated and gainfully involved in a nation's affairs, the law makers and the people in authority become more conscious of the need to be civil and courteous and to be more transparent and honest. A natural phenomenon, given that mothers, wives and sisters expect no lesser when grooming their family members.

Madam Speaker, it is truly a proud moment for me today to stand together on this side of the Chamber with my FijiFirst colleagues in Government and to join the sentiments expressed so proudly by our courageous leader and I quote, "Majority of Fijians have emphatically voted for ongoing inclusive progress, unequivocally rejecting politics of fear-mongering, unattainable promises and division, distrust and disunity."

Madam Speaker, like many of my colleagues from my generation, I was first attracted to the FijiFirst team because of its resounding message of one Fiji for all Fijians. I grew up in a rural area of Fiji where whilst we all lived harmoniously side by side, there were unwritten creeds expressed by some leaders and their policies which made us feel that certain privileges, awards, grants and status were

unattainable by all. In its years of service in Government, FijiFirst has proved that our fears experienced when we were growing up were unfounded and that, Fiji is indeed for all Fijians.

I, on behalf of myself and my Party, wish to thank the voters in majority who had the wisdom to choose the right option for our Government. I also would like to put on record a special thanks to all our candidates during the 2018 Elections, for without them this victory would not have been possible.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister and the Party Management for having faith and trust in me and assigning me my Ministerial Portfolio. I would also like to put on record my special thanks to my two daughters who have always been the pillar of strength for me and my mother and special thanks to my *chacha*, Hafiz Ud Dean, and my brother Farman and his team from Nadi.

Madam Speaker, FijiFirst's record during its four years terms speaks volumes for its commitment to spearhead the advancement of our country. The Fiji we now live in is unrecognisable from the Fiji of the past decades.

Madam Speaker, I had the honour of serving my country over the past four years in Ministries where significant work has been done by all concerned in improving the lives of ordinary Fijians – improvements in training and empowering of women, better allowances for destitute persons, senior citizens and disabled person. Schemes have been set in motion to address poverty alleviation, better health services by virtue of provision of newer health centres, hospitals, birthing clinics and centres and improvement in existing hospitals and medical services.

Madam Speaker, for a country with a small population and small Gross Domestic Product (GDP) versus many so developed nations, we have free education at primary and secondary schools, access for all at tertiary level without the need for heavy family debt burden, free medicine schemes and health services, assistance by the way of power and utility subsidies, bus fare subsidies for school children and those in need. And to top it all, Madam Speaker, we have a tax free threshold of \$30,000, an envy of most of the developed of nations.

Our international airport is of world class standard, the periphery of the airport and drive in and out of centres close engender a sense of pride when we meet up with visitors to our shores.

Madam Speaker, the average Fijian has more take-home pay and with reduced educational and other essential services cost, has of course improved our propensity to save or make other investments or lifestyle changes. The increase in owned vehicles by the average household and the accelerated pace of building and constructions everywhere, noted through the lack of skilled workers, is a sure testimony that people's lives are changing. Fiji and Fijians are moving forward and we will maintain, if not increase our momentum to ensure that we live no Fijian behind as we move forward as a nation.

Madam Speaker, what is the general expectation of any average citizen and family, be it in Fiji or anywhere else for that matter? A happy family life and an environment where children can have ready access to education and a future promising economic and social advancement. A safe and a secure surrounding, a society free from name calling identity, void of any fear of reprisal for being of a particular creed, faith or caste. A promise, Madam Speaker, which FijiFirst under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister and our Government is so diligently dedicated to deliver.

Madam Speaker, we hear stories on a daily basis of countries where the ethos of some political parties and even some ruling governments are increasingly becoming more and more insensitive towards the rights and feeling of specific communities and groups.

Madam Speaker, living in Fiji where despite our cultural and religious differences, we have learnt to co-exist with each other peacefully. Madam Speaker, as Honourable Members of this august Parliament, we need to do our part to ensure that peaceful co-existence continues for centuries and centuries to come.

Madam Speaker, what does it take to bring about unsavoury environments of hate, suspicion, jealousy fuelled by bigots? I suspect not much. Unfortunately a free and democratic environment of freedom of speech to say and preach such malice can be severely abused.

Madam Speaker, leadership of any powerful institution comes with the ever more powerful responsibility of guiding the people ably. Not for self-aggrandizement, but for the betterment of all. An art which our Honourable Prime Minister has mastered so well, having courageously defended the rights of all his people equally and laying the vision for a beautiful Fiji which we all can truly and proudly hail "as the way the world should be" or as the way our world should be.

Madam Speaker, we are a small island nation separated by vast ocean from major trading partners and sources of our prime industries. A small population base poses challenges for insufficient demand to be satisfied by economically viable local production or quantity backed consumer market. Three decades or more ago, Madam Speaker, nations with large population bases were considered poor and economically disadvantaged. Not so, some of the most advanced economies now have huge population backing.

Madam Speaker, as evidence during its last four years in Government, the nation which we have the honour of leading has shown abundant opportunities; opportunities created by our consciousness to rectify shortcomings in services and amenities available for a better life for all Fijians; opportunities created by a conducive environment for people and companies to invest and bring about progress. For this, Madam Speaker, a key ingredient is the availability of a skilled workforce. Sadly, it is no secret that we have a skills-deficit in Fiji in almost many spheres of trade and professions.

The Ministry I have the honour to lead has already worked with the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, to review and enhance apprenticeship programmes which will be a key contributor to addressing our skills development.

My Ministry is taking steps to maximise opportunities to strengthen the technical and vocational sectors. Any investment in such measures should yield appreciable returns in a reasonable timeframe. We cannot mark time; we need to progress diligently if we are to arrest the skills-shortage and produce the calibre of personnel necessary to meet the development goals of this nation.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that the exercise is not just a "numbers game", but of a quality which will continue significantly to the contribution of our needs. It is the immediate desire of my Ministry to focus on improving the standard of English by looking at various strategies; integrating the teaching of different Math in schools, teaching Language using *Walesi* as a digital platform; encouraging professional development for our teachers through scholarships to meet the priority areas of the Government and the Ministry. Obviously, another priority for the Ministry is the ongoing restructure and the salary increases for our teachers.

Madam Speaker, in addition, we are going to look at increasing counselling services within our school system for both teachers and the students.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government's initiative in expanding Tertiary Scholarships empowers us much more emphatically to work with the Ministry of Civil Service and the TSLB in ensuring that scholarships offered by the Government and donors meet the needs of our nation.

We are working with all our universities which are funded by the Government to ensure that we coordinate better. All and any necessary avenues need to be identified and desirable outcomes accelerated, so that we are in a better position to better meet the targets identified in the National Employment Policy.

Madam Speaker, in line with the FijiFirst Manifesto, we will promote the increased participation of women and girls in traditionally male trades and occupations. This requires a mind-set change in all forms of teaching, whether it is in schools, universities, technical and vocational institute and, indeed, amongst potential employers as well. We are committed to promoting the green economy through supporting a greater understanding of climate change and mitigation through our school curriculum and our universities. Both our commitment to gender inclusiveness in trades, et cetera, and the promotion of green economy must not be left in “too hard files” or be symbolic lip-service generally coined by politicians, we need real commitment and results. I stand firmly behind these commitments of my Government.

Madam Speaker, our teachers need to be better supported, particularly in terms of English and Maths through continuing professional developments. We recognise that the quality of students can only be improved by quality and better equipped teachers. Fijian students should be no lesser equipped to meet the challenges and innovation posed by the rapidly-progressing technological world we are currently living in.

Madam Speaker, the world of education is seeing massive transformation. Technology is fast-outpacing all our previously known and accepted forms of intelligence. We cannot fall back on the excuse that we are a small nation, far removed from the main centres of technological advancement and centres of learning. The changes in modes of communication, internet and online feeds all allow us to keep pace with the world of learning.

To this end, Madam Speaker, we will be continually reviewing our curriculum to ensure that it is fully-integrated and meets the needs of the fast-developing Fiji, and in line with the internationally-accepted innovations and transformations so as to produce young Fijians ready to take over the baton and to take on the world.

In emphasising inclusive approach, Madam Speaker, we must ensure that we are not leaving anyone behind. Therefore, we will pay particular attention to schools for our students with special needs, and most importantly, place particular emphasis on the foundation of all education: our Early Childhood and Care Education schools.

Madam Speaker, of course, we cannot forget the very special nature of our rich heritage and the make-up of our people and identities. As such, the teaching of conversational and contemporary *i Taukei* and Hindi will continue to be fostered, as this contributes to improving the understanding of our cultures and the unique blend of the Fijian identity. We are already contributing to the tourism industry but with the recognition that this remains truly the most growth-oriented sector, we will work on boosting significantly our outreach here as well, so as to be truly inclusive.

Madam Speaker, the sum total of all the foregoing is that we need a government which can deliver these results. I am proud to say that we have such a government again, one which has proven its resolve to make our country more economically-vibrant.

We need a Parliament, Madam Speaker, which understands the needs of the nation and our citizens and works collectively over and above petty point-scoring to make this country strong and vibrant.

I take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to pose this challenge to all our fellow Parliamentarians: let us rise above self-interest; let us work towards building a better Fiji; let us work towards a Fiji where we will not foster hatred and fear; let us work towards creating a Fiji where every Fijian feels safe; and work towards a Fiji where every child has a gleam of hope and excitement in their eyes for what the future holds for him or her.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- All children, as mentioned by our Honourable Prime Minister, are beautiful. Every Fijian child is precious, it matters not if they live in the outer islands, remote villages or communities, or towns and cities. We are legends for them only if we leave a legacy of which they can be proud of tomorrow. Otherwise, Madam Speaker, we are a wasted elite sitting here at the public expense and spewing unworthy diatribe and looked upon with ridicule by all.

Madam Speaker, I would like to conclude by making a special plea to all the Members present in this august House: to honour and love their country, the love that has brought us all here to sit in this august House; to honour the future needs of our country first and foremost; and not to dwell on our past failures.

In the memorable words of John F. Kennedy allow me to quote, Madam Speaker:

“We are not here to curse the darkness, but light the candle that can guide us through the darkness to a safe and a sane future.”

Our prayer that the Almighty will continue to watch over the very unique blend of kindredship and care which we Fijians feel for our next-door neighbours, regardless of our distinct ethnicity or religious learning. We, Fijians, are indeed unique.

We have shown the world over and over again our resolve to come out of the worst calamities and disasters. Of course, we, Fijians, are the envy of the Pacific for the progress we have achieved as a united nation of people. May we and our beloved Fiji always prosper and progress.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, we, on this side of the august Parliament, we are committed to ensuring and the Honourable Prakash has said this, and I am sure we all can unite and pray for the success and prosperity of our nation. We are committed to ensuring that our legacy is built on the values enshrined in our Constitution and lived by each one of us in our daily lives.

I thank you, Madam Speaker. As we are approaching the festive season, I am sure we will not be meeting each other before Christmas and New Year, please, allow me to thank you all for being part of this august House for the new term. I wish you all a very, very Merry Christmas. On behalf of myself and the Party, my two daughters, mum and my family, let us all have a blessed 2019. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. Time has caught up with us. We will now suspend our sitting and adjourn for morning tea. We will resume at 11.00 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen: It is my honour to deliver my Maiden Speech at the First Session of Parliament after the successful 2018 General Elections as the Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports.

Let me begin by joining other Members of this august Parliament in congratulating you, Madam Speaker, for your Second Term as the Honourable Speaker of this House. You are a great and strong representation of women leadership and we look forward to working under your guidance. I would also like to congratulate Honourable Veena Bhatnagar in her appointment as Deputy Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I join other Members and applaud the fact that we have more female representation in Parliament than ever before. This is timely and a step in the right direction towards a more inclusive Parliament. The opening remarks by His Excellency the President bears witness to the values on which modern states are founded. These values are based on the principles of a service-based and transparent government that delivers on the expectations of all citizens in a fair, just and equitable manner, like the FijiFirst Government for the past four years and who will continue to deliver on this for the next four years.

I note and commend His Excellency's interest on youths, on youth leadership and the need to include youths in planning, decision-making and implementation of our policies and programmes. Madam Speaker, the words from His Excellency the President, gives us a sound platform to work as leaders for the good of all Fijians. I thank His Excellency the President for his clear message about these values. It provides a pathway for all of us as leaders to follow as we serve the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, it is with immense pride that I offer my hearty congratulations to our Honourable Prime Minister for successfully leading our FijiFirst Party into a Second Term of office. This is truly a fine achievement of a statesman and an honest leader. Madam Speaker, no doubt, a Second Term of the FijiFirst Government means that we will continue to deliver on the programmes and achievements from our First Term in office and on our manifesto for an inclusive, progressive and sustainable nation built on the principles of unity and harmony.

Madam Speaker, it is on the mandate of an inclusive, fair and just Fiji for all Fijians that the FijiFirst Government will govern and continue to provide service delivery. I join the Honourable Prime Minister and other Honourable Members to thank all our supporters for their sacrifice and hard work in ensuring victory for the Party that cares for all Fijians. Thank you, Team Fiji, for bringing it home.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my mother who has always been a pillar of strength in my life. I thank and acknowledge the Almighty for the blessing of our success but more importantly, Madam Speaker, for a peaceful transition during the Election.

Madam Speaker, I also join the other speakers in thanking the Fijian Elections Office and the Supervisor of Elections and staff for a job well-done and I congratulate the members of the Multi Observer Group (MOG) for their input and declaration of a free and fair Election.

Madam Speaker, in welcoming the Opposition Members to this Chamber, we look forward to a healthy and well-informed debates and discussions. As His Excellency the President pointed out, Madam Speaker, we have a role beyond playing politics in this Parliament. Such healthy and relevant debates should lead to directions and decisions in the greater interest of our beloved nation.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately the Opposition in the Elections and in their contributions to the debates in Parliament yesterday have continued to insist on misleading deliberations and show boating rather than telling the truth.

As we have moved forward as a nation, Madam Speaker, the Opposition, among its campaign promises, decided to promote the idea of a move backward to the 1997 Constitution. SODELPA, in their questionable wisdom decided that they return to a communal and a racially segregated electoral system under the 1997 Constitution would be the way forward for Fiji.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, this backward step was a staged drama, based on a narrow and selfish vision for Fiji.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- The campaign by SODELPA to get back to the 1997 Constitution was only because of greed and selfishness. Madam Speaker, greed and selfishness to once again appeal to the *i Taukei* voters bank of the past by spreading false news and outright lies of threats to indigenous rights and alienation of their land.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, this was no more than a blunt appeal for a communal and race based voting bank; something that they have exploited through lies and deception, just like they looted the National Bank of Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please let him speak, you will get your turn!

HON. SPEAKER.- We will give you extra time.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, a regressive vision that fortunately the people of Fiji rejected.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, the 1997 Constitution, like the other communal and racially charged Constitutions of 1970 and 1990, is where it deserves to be confined to the archives of history and long may it stay there.

Madam Speaker, as a nation, Fijians rejected divisions over unity. Madam Speaker, then there is an issue of lies over truth. Madam Speaker, I asked the leader of the National Federation Party (NFP), unfortunately they are not here but they must be listening in, to confirm or deny the marriage between NFP and that of SODELPA during the midnight hours of Elections.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, can the leaders of the NFP deny that their party had agreed to the marriage with SODELPA, in their greedy hopes to form a coalition government against FijiFirst? And, Madam Speaker, why are they silent now because the people want to know? They are behaving like the shy shameful bride, opting out of the final rites, or did both - went through the engagement rituals but never told their supporters.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the truth has already come out. One only has to see the voting pattern in this Parliament over the course of its opening session, and we all know who is in bed with whom.

Madam Speaker, the lies and deception of the other side will only serve to highlight the good news of the FijiFirst over the false news of its opposition.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst victory is a victory of a party and of a government that thinks beyond Elections and thinks about nation-building and sustaining this for the generations to come.

(Acclamations)

As the American thinker James Freeman Clark said and I quote;

“The difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician thinks about the next election while the statesman thinks about the next generation.”

(Chorus of interjections)

(Acclamations)

HON. P.K. BALA.- This is the situation that we have here, Madam Speaker, and it is on this platform of working for generations rather than just to win Elections that we move forward with more good news for the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we, in the FijiFirst Government, have demonstrated in the past that strength in diversity comes from unity of thought and actions towards a common purpose like nation-building. It is this unity of purpose that we will work towards the stated aims of our FijiFirst Government, that is for a better Fiji for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, as His Excellency the President noted, it is also timely that we engage more on our youth and include their thoughts, ideas and innovation in programmes about them.

Madam Speaker, we will continue the delivery of programmes to both the rural youth and those in our urban corridors, in particular for young women in areas like empowerment, health and wellness, self-help projects, leadership training, just to name a few.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, these were a few who were saying in the last term that they will be sitting this side, we will be sitting that side. So for now, can you please, sit quietly and listen.

(Laughter)

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- The only graduation is that from there, you have come here.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, sports unites us and in Fiji, we know that sports have greatly united us and presented our small island nation with pride and achievement on global stage. The success of the Olympics and the World Champion Sevens Team, the *Flying Fijians*, and more recently the Fijian rugby side have all contributed in the economic sector for Fiji and brought added glory to our beloved nation, and of course, the win over France by the *Flying Fijians* this past weekend augurs well as we move towards the Rugby World Cup in 2019.

Madam Speaker, our congratulation goes to the players, team management, and all those who were involved in this win and the world will be watching as the fantastic Fijian Sevens Team prepares for the Olympic Gold Medal Sevens Rugby in Japan in 2020.

Madam Speaker, I would like to make my final remarks by paying some attention to the task of nation- building. Madam Speaker, in just over a year, 2020, Fiji will celebrate its golden jubilee or 50th year of independence. Madam Speaker, as a child from a generation of an immediate period of independence, I am proud to touch on this subject as we approach to this important milestone. As a child, the message I got from 10th October 1970, provided the pride and drive for me to serve my country in whatever capacity I could.

Madam Speaker, it is important that our current generation are assured of this same right of being a proud and valued citizen of Fiji. I recall those moments from 1970 as I feel that it carries a noteworthy message as we begin another Parliamentary term, another term of the FijiFirst Government. The message, Madam Speaker, is that we need to, more than any other time in our history, to focus on a Fiji that unites us on the pathway to being a great nation as we move towards our 50th year of Independence, and we reject the notion as the Fijian people have done in the 2018 General Elections of a regressive, narrow, ethnically-divided vision given by the Opposition that takes us back to a divided nation.

Madam Speaker, we look forward to serving all Fijians with sincerity and dedication. Our sole concern is the welfare of our people and our country. I believe that service is the best form of leadership. Madam Speaker, I am privileged and honoured to make this maiden speech for this term of Parliament and I look forward to the upcoming four-year term of the FijiFirst Government. May God bless us all. Thank you and *vinaka*.

(Applause)

HON SPEAKER.- I now call on the Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar to have the floor.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, our visitors in the gallery and my fellow Fijians: *Ni sa bula, Namaste, Salaam Alaykum* and a very good morning to you all.

At the outset, Madam Speaker, I thank the Almighty for giving me yet another opportunity to serve my fellow Fijians under the great leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister. Also, Madam Speaker, very humbly, I thank His Excellency the President of Fiji for his most precious, enlightening and insightful address on Monday.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed an honour and privilege to be once again elected to the Fijian Parliament and reappointed as the Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. I am confident that with the support and guidance of the line Minister, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, we will continue to serve the disadvantaged with much zeal, compassion, and commitment.

Madam Speaker, please allow me also to congratulate your good-self for being re-appointed as the Honourable Speaker of this august Parliament. Your legacy as the first woman Speaker of Parliament in Fiji and the Pacific continues, and I must say, we are all very proud of that.

I wish to also convey my heartfelt congratulations to our Honourable Prime Minister on his victory in these Elections and redeeming the trust and faith of our people in the Fijian Government and the FijiFirst Government.

I must say that this win is a blessing to Fiji and to all Fijians. Our nation and our people will undeniably and positively prosper under the visionary, strong and compassionate leadership of our Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama.

Madam Speaker, I also congratulate every woman who has made it to this august Chamber. It is a reassurance that equal opportunities for women in Fiji are not a myth. Alluding to what our Honourable Prime Minister has already mentioned in his reply, Madam Speaker, the numbers may not be equal yet but the fact that today we have ten women, democratically elected to the Fijian Parliament, speaks volumes about us as a progressive society.

Also, Madam Speaker, a hearty congratulation to the Supervisor of Elections and his team for a job well done. Madam Speaker, in my maiden speech today, I sincerely render my gratefulness, my appreciation and profound gratitude to every Fijian who had bestowed unwavering support for FijiFirst. My dear fellow Fijians, we attribute our win to your confidence and faith in the FijiFirst Party and its visionary leadership. No doubt, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government will continue to govern with good intentions and ensure that integrity, honesty and passion prevails in the implementation of our Government policies.

On this day, I remember my grandparents, the late Mr and Mrs Shankar and my parents, the late Mr and Mrs Ajun Shankar of Colasi Rakiraki, who have instilled in me the values that I hold dear to this day: hard work, sincerity, integrity, honesty, love and compassion for all. All my life, I have witnessed my parents serving selflessly. They were my role models, good human beings who inspired me towards selfless service for mankind, and I am glad that these humanitarian values have played an instrumental role towards my approach to service delivery in both my portfolios.

Madam Speaker, I also want to thank my husband, Mr. Stash Bhatnagar, for being a pillar of strength over the years and for inspiring me towards greater achievements. My children, Shaniel and Supriya; my son-in-law, Mustafa; and my granddaughter, Zoya, whom I am very proud of. As well as the rest of my extended family, including my brothers, Manoj and Suresh; cousin, Vikash; nephew, Sumit; and my aunty, Mrs Shiu Charan, for their continuous support.

Madam Speaker, there are many people throughout Fiji whose blessings, prayers and support has contributed towards our win. I would like to sincerely thank Master Shakeel, Mr. Vimal Prakash, Ms Manju Ram, Mr. Vasanti Prasad, Ms. Roshni, Ms. Veena, Ms. Ashika, Mr. Dewan, Mr. Umesh, Master

Mohinesh, Mr Niranjan Prasad, Ms Manjula, Ms Neha, Ms. Suman, Ms. Irene, Mr. Praneel Kumar, Mr. Mahendra Singh, Mr. Chandra Prakash and Pt. Maharaj, for their assistance.

I would also like to thank the people of Dugapatu, Colasi, Naria, Ellington, Naqoro, Galau, Korotale and other parts of Rakiraki for their support, along with family and friends from Lautoka and other parts of Fiji.

A big *vinaka vakalevu* to all the volunteers, our FijiFirst family members and every individual who stood by FijiFirst.

A very special acknowledgment to Ms. Sheryl Mudaliar for her unwavering support throughout my campaign trail. Thank you Sheryl for being there by my side at all times. My heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to you and your family.

Madam Speaker, my thank you list will be incomplete without acknowledging the tireless efforts, hard work, determination, stamina and perseverance of our Attorney-General, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum. Thank you, Sir, for your continued support, your guidance and your wisdom to take Fiji forward. You have been a pillar of strength to all the members of the FijiFirst family. Honourable Attorney-General, Sir, thank you for being there for us.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, I wish to take time to reflect on my experiences in the last term. It was such an incredible journey, indeed, a great learning experience.

Initially, assuming the role of Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services was an honour and a challenge as well. Later, the move to the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation further expanded my experience, this time, giving me the responsibility to work with the most disadvantaged segments of the Fijian population. In fact, Madam Speaker, I was blessed to have had the opportunity to work, undoubtedly, with two of the most important Ministries which demanded the highest level of communication, passion, commitment and service delivery.

Madam Speaker, although it was not new for me to interact with people from the communities in the last four years, I have certainly understood in depth, the real life challenges of our disadvantaged population. The Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation being the custodian of the welfare of people living in poverty, the elderly, people living with disabilities, women and children, has a very huge responsibility - the responsibility to make life easier for the most vulnerable groups of our people in our beloved nation.

Madam Speaker, we will be working towards the Economic Empowerment of People with Disabilities Programme which is specifically for Fijians living with disabilities, to engage in entrepreneurial activities using their skills and business sense to sustain themselves. Never before has any Fijian Government recognised this to be a possibility, Madam Speaker, and having this Programme in place upholds this Government's commitment to equal treatment and equal opportunities to all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I pledge to assist and work with my line Minister, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, to change the dynamics of service and opportunities to our people living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, being part of the FijiFirst movement, led by our Honourable Prime Minister, I will once again serve to my full ability, in achieving our mission to build a just, fair and progressive society in which all Fijians benefit. I am really proud to be part of an inclusive Government where no one is left behind.

Looking back at the devastation caused by *TC Winston* in the Western Division, Madam Speaker, it does not take a genius to figure out what it must feel like living in the ruins of what people called a 'home'. It does not take an economist to figure out the loss of crops and livestock destroyed, as the damages extend way beyond its monetary value. It only takes a compassionate heart, it only takes a determined Government to make it their business to put a roof back on the heads of our people.

Madam Speaker, only the FijiFirst Government could come up with an initiative like, Help for Home, Home Care and Farm Care.

(Acclamations)

Madam Speaker, whilst the FijiFirst Government continued to create equitable forms of opportunities and assistance for our people to get back on their feet, there were some heartless people who tagged these Programmes as 'freebies' and 'handouts'. Madam Speaker, this was outright, disrespectful and an insult to our people who were in dire need of assistance at that time.

Madam Speaker, FijiFirst believes, no one owes us a living, we will avoid creating a dependency syndrome but this does not mean we will neglect the poor and needy. We will continue to:

- reach out to the vulnerable and the disadvantaged;
- uphold the values of inclusivity and fairness for all, creating opportunities for the young and old, and equal rights for women; and
- create a society where there is compassion and action for the less fortunate.

Madam Speaker, FijiFirst's objective is to create conditions for self-reliance and entrepreneurship and empower Fijians to take advantage of these opportunities.

There is no doubt, Madam Speaker, that under the great leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister our Government has achieved much more for all Fijians than any other Government in the Fijian history.

(Honourable Member interjects)

(Acclamations)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- As very rightfully pointed out by His Excellency the President of Fiji in His Address yesterday, and I quote:

“Leadership is about speaking the truth, even when the truth may be difficult to hear. It is about putting forward real policy that is carefully crafted to create the greatest possible public good. It is about setting vision for today, tomorrow, the year ahead, and even a generation from now by putting in the work that yields long-term benefits for our children, their children, and their children after them. And that is what my Government will strive to do in our upcoming term.”

Madam Speaker, under the visionary leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, FijiFirst Government will continue to turn promises into deeds. A salute to his leadership that has ensured, and will continue to ensure stability, security and equality in our beloved country, Fiji.

We stand for the right of ordinary Fijians, Madam Speaker, to be treated with dignity and respect in the society, to be recognised and valued as citizens, and to have a say in their nation's future. To my fellow Fijians, once again, thank you for embracing the truth, thank you for your trust in FijiFirst, thank you for choosing a leader who is strong, focussed and compassionate, and thank you for embracing the fact that FijiFirst is the way forward for all Fiji and Fijians. We will continue to serve you to the best of our abilities, my fellow Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I am also humbled by my appointment as the Deputy Speaker of this Parliament. Thank you. The FijiFirst Government believes in equality, harmony, unity and modernity, and under the great leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, together we will take Fiji forward.

God bless Fiji and Fijians. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca to take the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech and Address yesterday, but I thought he was still campaigning for the FijiFirst Party. May I request the Government not to draft a Presidential Address that would or may embarrass His Excellency. They must not lower his dignity by forcing him to, again, do a political speech as if campaigning here in this House. The campaign has finished.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, His Excellency has brought out certain interesting points or issues that need to be clarified or corrected which I will touch on later.

HON. MEMBER.- Point of order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In a maiden speech, no one is supposed to be interjecting.

HON. SPEAKER.- I did not hear you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In a maiden speech, no one is supposed to be interjecting. That is the point of order.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I cannot hear.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Standing Order says that when a person...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! I would like to hear the point of order being raised, please.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Standing Order 74, can you read that?

When a person is delivering a maiden speech, no one should be interjecting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. Can I make my ruling, please?

You may interject, but interject responsibly and this has been happening in the past. Honourable Members, I must remind you that a point of order is a point of order and not a statement. And the point of order has to be made when someone is going against the rules and not on the content of speech.

Earlier on this morning, we had a point of order which was more of a statement. The point of order should be only just one, two or at the most, three sentences and not a statement. Anyway, thank you very much, but I will allow interjections but with responsibility, please.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, perhaps the Honourable Member may have misled Parliament because he said, Standing Order 74 points specifically at no interjections being made during a maiden speech. Standing Order 74 does not mention maiden speeches at all, it only mentions points of order, not maiden speeches.

(Honourable Niko Nawaikula interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for the clarification, Honourable Member. Would you withdraw that point of order, now that we have clarified? No statement, just point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Honourable Bulanauca, you may continue.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

First of all, I wish to thank the Lord God for His support, leadership and strength under the circumstances, guidance and spirit to complete the most delayed, rushed, ill-prepared and cruellest General Elections 2018. First ever cruellest and rushed one by none other than the FijiFirst! We were only given, not even a week for this session.

Secondly, I wish to thank my family - wife and children for their support, in the Northern Division - Labasa, Basoga, Nasadrou; in the Central Division - Suva, Nakasi, Davuilevu, Luvunavuaka in Dawasamu and England, for moral support as well.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank all the *Tui ni Vanua* of the province of Bua for their support, the head of which is the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* now left out by the FijiFirst Party. Another first, always the bad first! What right have you to do that you wait and see, *waraka namaka!*

I personally thank:

- Na i tikotiko Vakaturaga e Nasaru, Tui Bua;
- Tui Wailevu, Buli Dama;
- Burenitu, Sauturaga of Buli Lekutu;
- Navakasiga, Buli Naivakasiga;
- Daviko, Tui Vuya;
- Buli Raviravi, Tui Nakorolevu;
- Nai Sualevu, Nawaido;
- Buli Navere, Nadi;

- Tui Kubulau, Kiobo;
- Tui Vanua, Namalata,
- Qalitu; Tui Nadivakarua; and
- Nakorotiki, Gone Turaga na Tui Wainunu.

Certainly, not forgetting to thank my small remote village of Naivakasali Wainunu, for voting for SODELPA 96 percent in 2014 and now 100 percent in 2018. Come 2022, it will be 110 percent. You work it out.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank the President of SODELPA Bua Sub-Constituency, Gone Turaga tiko e Daviko, na Gone Turaga Tui Vuya, Ratu Apimeleki Rabona.

Many thanks to chairpersons of all villages, branches and each woman and youth member. Your work has been great and may our good Lord bless you all.

Madam Speaker, for the party agents, thank you for observing and monitoring voting, counting in both, pre-poll and voting day activities. The process does not allow us candidates to be with you at voting day or time. You did well which is most appreciated, so blessings be with you.

A special thank you to our campaign team and to mention a few who are as follows:

- Jale Baba who is still in the hospital today;
- Seru Semi of Nasadrou, Nakorotiki;
- Ifereimi Draunimasi of Vuniwai, Nakorotiki;
- Lisala Namu of Namuavoivoi;
- Watisoni Nakadrudru, originally from Nasolo;
- Navi of Nawailevu;
- Rupeni of Nabouwalu;
- Namua of Namau;
- Tevita Nakawakawa, Namolivoi, who now lives in Nasekula; and
- others who I have not mentioned.

Thank you very much indeed.

Madam Speaker, a special mention for the support of Basilio of Kilaka, Rupeni of Nasasaivua, Mosese Gun of Raviravi. I also wish to thank the party leader of the team in Bua.

Madam Speaker, my apology to the electorates of Bua for any matter whatsoever that was not properly carried out - the protocol, planning or preparedness, campaign speeches, tone or unanswered questions that may have occurred or unnoticed during the campaign.

But to all who voted for me, the Party Leader, Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka and SODELPA Party, SODELPA and I are indebted for your support that we have progress so far. I am now elected, nominated and elected again for the fourth time into Parliament, against all odds the so-called democracy which is, in fact, dictatorship by the FijiFirst Party.

A big thank you to all our supporters in Bua, throughout Fiji and overseas as well, in the Northern, Western, Central and Eastern Divisions, our Rotuman neighbours and the congregation of Kenani Methodist Church at Farm Road in Davuilevu. We thank you all for standing for the truth, nothing but the absolute truth.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- That is absolute truth! You need to hear that from now on. Do not tell lies. We lost in 2014, with that truth again in 2018, but that truth and the morning star as in SODELPA symbol will rise sooner rather than later.

May the good Lord, the Lord of Lords and the Kings of Kings be with us all.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President also touched on the Constitution and I wish to comment on that. I am concerned for any Constitution that is forced down the throats of people, for example the 2013 Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- It is a concern because the document should be for the people, by the people - the claim there is, is false, a big lie - forced down by the Military Council Government after Bainimarama *coup d'état* by ousting the SDL elected Government in 2006.

His Excellency the President touched on the 1987 *coup* where no one was killed and quickly handed over the government to an elected government in 1992 after the 1990 Constitution. Madam Speaker, the later *coups*, the year 2010 was held under the management and control of the current Prime Minister as the Military Commander at that time. This *coup* with its following associated mutiny, some of our soldiers were killed or murdered, and the law has not been allowed to take its course to-date. How can one keep harping about peace and prosperity when the aggrieved families are still crying today? How foolish one can be?

Justice has been denied so to-date, we need justice. Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President did not mention the *coup* of 2006 which the current Honourable Prime Minister and his military followers conducted against the will of the people - the SDL Government who won consecutive General Elections in 2001 and 2006. Despite his army of independents who stood for Elections and opposed the SDL Party in 2006, SDL Party came out winner.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- These independents failed but were financially supported by two tourist resort owners. One has now passed away and the other is alive in the Yasawas today. Very soon he will be no more too. To save his skin from the law, he ousted the SDL Government, blaming the *qoliqoli* and Land Claims Tribunal and lies about financial mismanagement, corruption and nepotism and to eradicate them from government. He did not eradicate it from the government, he increased it. These sins cannot be eradicated but minimised only whenever possible. However, we know notice increase in poor financial management, more symptoms of corruption and real nepotism. We only stand and be amazed with such happenings, selfish, unbecoming leadership.

On secular state according to the dictionary- "secular" means worldly, of man. It has never been stated as such in previous Constitutions but only by the 2013 Constitution alone, first by the FijiFirst Party.

Madam Speaker, I will touch on legal issues at the moment. Legality, rather than morality, justice and fairness has been the game for the last four years and it is due to happen in the next four years to the detriment of the people of Fiji. Laws do have spirit, particularly when it is based on Christian values and principles, but the current laws do not have such a spirit. They are vindictive, alien to Fijian, *i Taukei*, Christians and to the Pacific culture. But the law or rule is only as good as those creating them.

The current confused interpretation of laws in Fiji by the FijiFirst Party only speaks for its creators; a confused, selfish and lustful leadership. A unity in diversity, Madam Speaker, we all accept our differences. We cannot be equal or be the same. We accept our differences as being a fact of life. All we have to do is love each other and unite amongst those differences.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- You better listen, learn something.

We are different from one another as determined by our Creator and therefore have differences. We must accept that aspect and live together in unity which makes life very interesting indeed. We cannot unite by a single superficial name such as the name “Fijian”, which was originally in reference to the *i Taukei* in the laws of Fiji. If the name may help, it should be properly handled and agreed to rather than forced down our throats.

May I now touch on the indigenous rights, Madam Speaker. It is a sad day indeed for the *i Taukei* in Fiji when their indigenous rights under ILO 169 and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) had been taken away by the false Constitution and Decrees made beforehand and locked by Sections 173 and 174 of the draconian Constitution of 2013. These Decrees do take away the rights and authority of the indigenous *i Taukei* people here in Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- You people listen and learn.

(Laughter)

It is a sin to say a half-truth such as the *i Taukei* landownership is well protected by the 2013 Constitution....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- They are fond of announcing that that ownership of *i Taukei* land

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Sorry, Madam.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, if you think that the interjections are too loud and you are not heard, you can stop until they finish. We will give you extra time, please continue.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- It is sin to say a half-truth such as the *i Taukei* landownership is well protected by the 2013 Constitution; that is a half-truth, it is not correct. The ownership of *i Taukei* land in the Constitution is not forever but fails to tell the *i Taukei* people that their rights and authority have been taken away forever too. All the Decrees of 2009, 2010 and the 22 out of 26 Decrees directly related to *i Taukei* affairs including land and *qoliqoli* have taken away all rights of their self-determination and given it to the Government (as communism) which is now acting as god.

For example, the clause that there is no legal redress means the *i Taukei* owner cannot take up a legal case either to a Court of Law, Tribunal or Commission in case of illegal dealings or activities noticed. The Registrar in any of these legal bodies would receive such legal case and dump it into a rubbish tin, that is where the rights and authority of the *i Taukei* people has ended up today; “the rubbish

tin". How dare one to do that? Perhaps one does not understand the purpose of who and what is going on behind him, I am afraid.

On Land Swap, Madam Speaker, as has been mentioned that previous governments have sold native land.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- In Denarau there was no sell of native land it is only a land swap.

(Laughter)

It is a swap of Native land and Crown land. You listen and learn.

(Laughter)

Land swap means exchange of land from Native land to Crown land. Denarau is not a land sale, it is a window of opportunity for landowners to get maximum benefit on major developments. The Colonial Government has saw it fit to create a law to open opportunities, windows like that for landowners to benefit from. The 60 acres native land in the mangroves were exchanged with 16 acres of Crown land on the foreshore, where hotels were awaiting to be built and where landowners (three *yavusa* in Nadi) were going to benefit more. With the coming in of the Decree has taken away those benefits from the three *yavusa* in Nadi; it is a shame.

Similarly a land swap in Momi, same thing the native owners were going to benefit, but with the Decree that has taken away all those benefits from the landowners. So FijiFirst indeed is just taking away the money or income that was supposed to go to the *i Taukei* owners.

On the Surfing Decree, it takes away benefits already accruing to the *i Taukei* landowners. I will just give one example, there are plenty examples. Tavarua Resort \$350,000 going to three villages of Nabila, Momi and Nakorokula.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- May I listen to the Point of Order, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member referred to the Surfing Decree. There is no such thing as a Surfing Decree, he is misleading Parliament, there is a Surfing Act, there is no Surfing Decree.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That was a clarification, that is clearer now. Continue please, Honourable Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- That is a fact, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Act not fact.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Madam that is fact under the Crown Acquisition Ordinance that was made under that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Please understand Honourable Members that there are no more Decrees, they are all Acts. So please refer to that, otherwise you are referring to a non-existent Decree. Just please take note.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Well, that is the benefit that the landowners have been deprived off when the Decree or Act came into being. Also, the gravel royalty and sand royalty have been taken away by all those Decrees.

Our mineral royalty, there is no formula set to-date. It has taken them four years, might well take them another four years. The *i Taukei* people must remember that FijiFirst Party is here to slow down our education, deprive us of our employment, empty our pockets, deprive us of our income and opportunities to become dependent all the time on Government freebees and lollies, make us slaves in our own country and bury us alive.

The wheels of the sunset clause under the cultural autonomy is now rolling and it will be executed faster in the next four years. Brace yourselves!

I thank the National Federation Party for their steadfast position and their vision and stand to help the *i Taukei* in this country. Although alone, I thank you, Honourable Professor Biman for standing your ground this time for the truth. Time will come for your increase, sooner rather than later.

It is important, Madam Speaker, to have a good health so we need to live healthy lives, eat good food, drink fresh water, sleep well at the right time, plant more *yaqona*, drink less, do not drink it at all. The Ministry of Health rather than focusing on curative healthcare services need to focus on preventative healthful living lifestyles. We need good health and as healthy members of the public produce quality spiritual outputs and improve performance in production whatever that may be. Good health means good performance. Unfortunately Fiji ranks the highest with diabetes in the world. That is FijiFirst Party, again first in the bad.

Improvement to quarters all over Fiji for our Health Ministry is important.

Education, it is important that our curriculum is on the right path so that we have proper education for our people, particularly the curriculum needs to be changed to suit needs particularly to focus on agricultural areas and engineering. The experts can elaborate on that later.

Also, we need to keep our families intact rather than getting in laws that will separate our families; children from their fathers and mothers. It is also important to have the rights and the responsibilities spelt out properly in the schools. Parents need to do their work well.

On development, Madam Speaker, I thank the FijiFirst Government for upgrading the roads but most of those roads were built by the Alliance, SVT and SDL governments. That is only I asked them to do, tarsealing from Nabouwalu to Nabalebale and Wainunu/Cogea/Vunicaukuro to Namuavoivoi/Sasake. I request for more roads, do not improve the existing ones built by previous governments. So we are looking forward to the improving of those roads from Wainunu to Namuavoivoi and Sasake, and also from Nabouwalu to Nabalebale.

(Laughter)

On natural resources, Madam Speaker, it is important to have a good relook at the pine industry. There is supposed to be a 100 percent dividend right going to the Fiji Pine Trust, the pine landowners. We do not know where that 100 percent is going to now. It is important to have a good relook at that. By now they should have had over 50 percent of shares in the Pine Group. Secondly with the mahogany. Timber sales proceeds have not been paid to-date as promised under the Decree and also the extensions of leases have been done willy-nilly without the consent of the *mataqali* or the landowners themselves. So it is important to do that right rather than doing it wrong.

On agriculture, we need agriculture to be allocated to the private sector. We need more funds to be allocated there rather than concentrating on industries and commerce. We also need technology that will need to improve work and provide income for the rural areas to stop or minimise urban drift.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I wish everyone well for Christmas. Thank you very much indeed.

(Applause)

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, I rise in this august House to thank His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Fiji for his address on the occasion of the opening of the new Parliament term yesterday and also deliver my maiden speech in my second term of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, before dwelling to speak on the motion, I congratulate you once again upon your accession to the High Office in this Honourable House, on that note I wish you all the best.

I congratulate all the Honourable Members of Parliament and look forward for robust debates and heated question time in the coming sittings.

Madam Speaker, the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi, in Philippians 4:11-13 reads:

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty, I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Madam Speaker, first and foremost, I give the glory and the honour to our Almighty Father in Heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ for His guidance, favour and calling that has brought me here again. Madam Speaker, deep in me, I really believe in the ideology of a kingdom concept. If our nation is to progress in the future where favour and also peace is to be attained, I think a government structure needs to be established, mirrored on the words that is on our very Coat-of-Arms, '*Rerevaka na Kalou ka doka na Tui*'.

Growing from that, Madam Speaker, we can have a government structure established on theocracy, on the *vanua* and also on democratic institutions, and they can work and co-exist for a better Fiji which is ahead of us and that is my ideology. I believe that is the reason why God has brought me here again to complete that purpose.

Madam Speaker, 2018 has been a very challenging year for me and my family and having transiting from the court room to Parliament, from Parliament to the court room, from there to prison and

from prison back to Parliament. God tested my faith by putting me into trials where from human perspective, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. However, in those life trials, God wanted to demonstrate his miracle-working power changing our situations to rise from defeat to victory.

Madam Speaker, special gratitude goes to my campaign team, led by my father, Mr. Nemani Bulitavu; my manager, Mr. Maika Nakete; and the Macuata SODELPA Team; my uncles; my in-laws, who have all been very supportive during the three weeks of campaign; overseas supporters; our SODELPA village branches; party agents; polling agents; the prayers of all the churches in Fiji. To the people of Macuata, the *vanua* of Caumatalevu and all who voted for me from abroad and locally: *vinaka vakalevu* for trusting in me and having the confidence in me to serve you and the nation as a Member of Parliament.

To all my supporters and friends on social media, I thank your loyalty. Yes, we have made it to this mountain only to rest for a moment, to look back the distance we have come with fifteen SODELPA seats in 2014, and now twenty-one SODELPA seats, which is an achievement to help us climb the next mountain. We should not dare linger, for our walk to make Fiji free again through a leadership that listens, has not yet ended.

I also thank my dear wife, Mrs. Rasala Bulitavu, and the children for their prayers and support which have kept me going, not forgetting the inmates' prayer team at Nasinu Correction Centre, who continue to pray for God's purpose for my life to be fulfilled.

Madam Speaker, on 26th March 2018, I was found guilty by the Magistrates' Court for the offence of sedition. As a result of that conviction, on 3rd April, 2018, the Honourable Speaker advised me through a letter that my seat was immediately vacated as I would be disqualified from being a candidate in the 2018 Elections.

On 30th April, 2018, I was sentenced to two years five months and thirteen days imprisonment. On 24th August, I was released from prison and my conviction was set aside on the grounds of miscarriage of justice and a retrial was ordered.

Speaking on freedom of expression and our fundamental right to practice democracy and help evolve vibrant and robust democratic institutions and structures of the State, Madam Speaker, I deem it prudent to respond on the same by saying that we do not need to use our laws, our State institutions and structures to oppress our people, particularly those who disagree or oppose the Government.

For a healthy democracy that His Excellency the President spoke about once again yesterday, healthy debate and discussion in Parliament, outside of Parliament, in the newspapers, on television, on social media should be embraced, not looked at as another act of insurrection. The right and freedom of expression must be preserved at all cost.

I think no one likes to see a situation where we get bogged down to threatening our media but with draconian laws and licensing mechanism seeking to penalise expression of views rationally on social media.

Madam Speaker, loyalty to the State has many interpretations. For the Government side as their actions and utterances depict loyalty, to them means being loyal to the FijiFirst Party Government which they perceive as the State given their long innings in power.

Madam Speaker, for us in the Opposition, our version of loyalty means being loyal to the people who make up the State and therefore we do not subscribe to the thought that you charge people with sedition just because you disagree with what you are doing and what you are saying. Free speech is a

hallmark of a functioning democracy, be a unifying force, not a divisive force, to be a leader you promise to the people that you would be caring for all, not just for those who voted.

Madam Speaker, going a step further, I might suggest to the Government side that you might consider allowing in the footsteps of our neighbour, New Zealand, whose Prime Minister we hosted a couple of years ago and welcomed in our country and talked about your revolution. Well, here is a revolutionary idea - remove the offence of sedition from our laws, we do not need it. England and Wales removed it. Will Fiji follow suit?

Madam Speaker, if you are worried about hate speech, the Constitution covers that. Any and every criticism by a citizen of this country aimed at you, your Cabinet, your Government is not seditious, it is criticism. Let your people speak freely, stop muzzling the media and the people.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No one is muzzling the media. Speak the truth.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, when the Magistrate bowed to return to her Chambers, I said "Goodbye" to my wife and my family, party officials and supporters, my lawyers, Ms. Barbara Malimali, Mr. Filimone Vosarogo and the Honourable Lynda Tabuya. I carried with me a small bag contained a pair of flip-flops, toothbrush, undergarments and two disposable shavers, the Court Judgement and the late Nelson Mandela's book, "Long Walk to Freedom", and my *Bible*.

I was taken away by heavily-guarded police escort to Suva Correction Centre where I spent eight days under solitary confinement, given my political background at the waiting cell before being transferred to the Nasinu Correction Centre.

Madam Speaker, after all the administration and personal information entered like all new inmates, I was issued two pairs of orange uniform, a toilet paper roll, a torn blanket, a torn towel, a dirty pillow with bugs and a bucket. Whilst being locked up in my cell, I had to fill the bucket with water to be used for urination. Every morning it starts with the routine stand-by, I am then allowed to empty my bucket, clean myself and locked up again waiting for breakfast to be served. Breakfast at 7.30 a.m. was a quarter loaf of bread with margarine and tea. Lunch at noon was a half loaf of bread with dhal or tea and dinner was a combination of soup, curry, stewed with plenty of water to fill the mess tin. This is served together with rice and common menu which every inmate refers to as *Wasawasa*.

Madam Speaker, after the third day in custody, I was granted to call my wife. At that point, being worried because she did not know what prison I was held at, it was a quick chat on the loud speaker with the officer hearing our conversation. I reminded her on the things to bring on her first prison visit. The Officer-in-Charge asked me if I can ask my wife to bring a towel, a bed sheet, blanket and a pillow from home because it was out-of-stock due to the overcrowding of prisoners.

At the Nasinu Correction Centre, after a week, I was allowed to work in the plantation and also became part of the daily harvesting taskforce team which would leave at 6.00 a.m. and return at 3.00 p.m. for dinner and locked up at 7.00 p.m. after devotion.

Prison life is a routine which makes time fly, it robs one of his or her freedom, attempts to take away your identity, designed to break one's spirit and destroy one's resolve. It is, by definition, a purely authoritarian state but to me, God sent to me prison for a purpose and to sharpen my vision to achieve what God is calling me for.

Madam Speaker, we have come to an end of a hard-fought General Elections and the results clearly showed that there is a significant shift of public opinion as opposed to the *Fiji Sun* polls pre-elections. The results of the Elections are clearly a rejection of over-regulation, over-taxation of the lives

of our people. It is a signal of the end of constitutional dictatorship, childish, ego-centric, confrontational and selfish leadership. It depicts that politics of fear, connivance, convenience and freebies do not and will not work. Our people are becoming aware of the true designs of the FijiFirst policies and programs.

Madam Speaker, the outcome of the Elections also depict that our people desire a nation that is free, just, prosperous and united under a leadership that listens. More and more people have reposed their faith in our customary and traditional institutions and structures as well as in their hope and belief of change. The increase in our parliamentary strength on the Opposition benches is a reflection of those desires and the will of the people.

For performance, Madam Speaker, of the FijiFirst Government in the last four years, it has reduced the measure of their performance. They have lost 5 seats and the Opposition has gained 6. That is the measure of their true performance and policies in the last 4 years.

In the midst of this, Madam Speaker, for any Honourable Member of political pundit to assert that we have achieved unity, equality, justice and security, is simply ridiculous. Instead, it draws home the point that there is a bad for all of us to do some soul-searching of where we have gone wrong as a result of which the voters have passed this kind of verdict and seek to facilitate dialogue and consensus to heal the nation.

It is time for reconciliation and rejuvenation, not the same old politics of division and diversion of the last 12 years. However, Madam Speaker, some of the partisan pronouncement by the Presidential speech is highly explosive, lethally divisive and unfairly conclusive in substance with a myopic point of sum total of our national conscience which is far greater than those captured from the address from the throne.

Madam Speaker, I have nothing today against His Excellency the President but I must state for the record that I have everything to say against the issues raised by the President's Address. Instead of it being the state of the nation's address, it turned out to be a defence statement against the Opposition and the Government as a hangover from the Elections campaign.

When one dissects the Address proper, it would be prudent to summarize the same as follows:

1. We were told that there is parliamentary democracy in Fiji but the truth is, we are still in constitutional dictatorship;
2. We were told of the rule of law but the truth is, there is one type of law but selected application of the same law, depending on who the law deals with;
3. We were told we have human rights but the truth is, our people continue to get injured and killed in custody, our rights to seek redress is limited as never before, and there are people awaiting justice in prison which they cannot have access to because there is no parole board, and the confusion in the process and procedures within the Fiji Correctional Services in terms of the Mercy Commission;
4. We were told that we have good governance and the truth is millions of public funds have gone missing. A report of the Auditor-General after exposing cases of non-compliance develops errors and the Code of Conduct and Right to Information legislations continue to be pending on our legislative agenda;
5. We were told that we have nine years of unprecedented economic growth but the truth is, unemployment is all time high and this pace of economic growth, which in reality is

consumption-driven, has failed to empower the ordinary masses. Their quality of life and standard of living remains the same or has gone worse in the last one decade.

6. We were told that we have carried out a record of infrastructure development but the truth is, our existing infrastructure has been meted out on Band-Aid solutions and almost all the new infrastructure developments are of very low and poor quality compromising our standards, endangering public safety and asset to cost us millions for maintenance work.
7. We were told that there has been a growth in every sector and facet of our national life but the truth is, our key employment sectors, for example, sugar, tourism, gold, copper, fisheries, forests and manufacturing are all in a state of either decline or stagnancy. In addition to that, in the last 12 years, the Government has not been able to create or rather establish one single industry to boost the national economy.
8. We were told that indigenous rights are fully protected under the current laws but the truth is, our group rights and entrenched rights are gone and with the abolition of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and the Senate, indigenous rights, land and *i qoliqoli* ownership and culture are all at the risk of slipping into oblivion, reducing us to foreigner status in our own homeland.

As if that is not enough, Madam Speaker, how can we forget the loss of over 1.2 million tonnes of soil shipped to China under the guise of Bauxite mining and here we are told that no native land has been lost under the Bainimarama leadership that happened in Nawailevu in Bua. Will they go back to China and bring that land back to Bua? Will that be replaced from a land from Kiuva to be taken to Bua, to replace all the big ores in the land that had been taken? That is the permanent loss of native land, that has never come up and that is a fact, Madam Speaker, that native land actually left our country under Bainimarama's leadership.

9. We were told that more Fijians are prosperous today than ever before but the truth is, let us examine who are these prosperous Fijians? Not all, not even 50.02 percent who voted this Government but only the elite interests and those who are part of the new patron-client culture, taking roots in the body politic of this nation.
10. We were told that we have the best health care in education system, but the truth, is we have the highest NCD cases in the Pacific while the health care and the medical services need an overhaul and we are producing students who have qualifications to use the analogy to say; "know how to fly the aeroplane but do not know how to land it."
11. We were told that we have a more secured nation today, but the truth is, Fiji was never ever in a huge debt trap nor our community relations were so low as it is now and nor our ports and airports were so insecure and it is now from intrusion by illegal immigrants and refugees

To sum it up, Madam Speaker, within our portfolio and as the Shadow Minister for Defence and also the Opposition Spokesman on Defence, we look forward that the Honourable Minister will come to us and give a background on the recent announcement of the expiry of our Lebanon Mission or RFMF for the Lebanon Mission. Also, the progress of the National Security and Defence Review Committee (NSDR), the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC), the White Papers - the Police White and the Military White Paper and on the progress of work and the budgeted allocation that has been given to them and if that could also be in his briefing when he delivers his maiden speech.

Madam Speaker, that is the summary of what I have to say today in my maiden speech and also I thank the Honourable Members for making me up-to Parliament and their campaign. It was a hard fought battle and I think it does not end there. For us in the Opposition, it is not over until it is over and I think there is an action that is coming, disputed returns, and that will be dealt with.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I once again congratulate you and all the Honourable Members. May God Bless Fiji and everyone, *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

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

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise to contribute to the motion to thank His Excellency for his most gracious speech delivered yesterday.

At the outset, Madam Speaker, allow me to thank a few people who helped me during my campaign. I am just glad because it is wonderful to be back. Thank you, Madam Speaker, wonderful to be back, to be amongst the people I have served with for the last four years and I kind of missed Parliament. So it is great to be back and to be amongst people who will work with us together to further the welfare of our nation.

Our people, Madam Speaker, who helped me in the campaign divided up the Nadroga/Navosa Province into three areas and I was given eight *tikinas*, namely -

1. Tikina Nokonoko - my gratitude to the Were Levu Totokonalagi;
2. Tikina o Sigatoka, Were Levu i Werenidri;
3. Tikina o Cuvu, Were Levu o Nakuruvakarua;
4. Tikina o Tuva, Were Levu o Vunawi;
5. Tikina o Malomalo, Were Levu o Nasosowaqa;
6. Tikina o Wai, Were Levu o Were Jina;
7. Tikina o Raviravi, na Vanua o Nakaria; and
8. Tikina o Malolo, Were Levu i Nalotu.

These were the *tikinas* who were there with me to campaign for these Elections and let me just say, Madam Speaker, what I discovered this time was this political maturity with our people, and how well they understand the part of Parliament and how critical it is in the role it plays for our nation.

Also, I want to thank those colleagues who were with me during my campaign, who worked with me almost on a daily basis: Ratu Iliaseri Vosailagi of Lomawai; Jo Naqota of Rukurukulevu; Ratu Tevita Lalabalavu (also known as Tui Visi) of Naqeledamu, Cuvu; Rupeni Qaraniqio of Cuvu; Iliesa Nasava of Naevuevu; and Mesulame Satala of Yanuya in the Yatu Malolo, and the many agents across the province who were there during the day of the Election. And of course, my dear wife Ruci, for being the strength behind me and being the treasurer who worked magic with the little budget I had to enable me to campaign.

Like the Honourable Prime Minister, I would also wish to congratulate the *Flying Fijians* for their victory in France. It is a huge achievement, Madam Speaker, and I also have a bit of background in rugby, being Chairman of FRU for some years and it reminds me of the time we played against Wales in 2010, we drew with Wales in Cardiff that year, 16-16.

When we left Nadi International Airport, we could not afford to pay for excess baggage. We were broke, but we went and drew with Wales. That, Madam Speaker, brings home the point I want to stress here is that, we want our boys to be well equipped. And part of that, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that we play together more frequently. If you notice in this tour of the Northern Hemisphere, they played against Scotland, did poorly, they began to up their game against Uruguay and the victory with France, which some of us; we already know, we have known for years, that the more our boys play together, the better they become.

And that, Madam Speaker, leads me to the yearly expenditure the tourism industry extends to the game in Suva between the *Crusaders*, *Highlanders* and the *Chiefs*, costing some \$4 million. That would be better spent if we spend for our own people. You will remember, Madam Speaker, that Apia, Samoa got the *All Blacks* to Apia and it cost them \$4 million, but it enabled the Samoan side to play against qualities like the *All Blacks*. We need to do more of that and I would ask my colleague, the new Honourable Minister for Tourism, to relook at this because I do not think the value of bringing those teams into Fiji is there in terms of tourism, but certainly will accrue to our boys when they play together.

Rugby, Madam Speaker, today is controlled by the broadcasters. In my time in the FRU, we used to ask the Northern Hemisphere team visiting this part of world to come and play in Fiji, but the broadcasters are the ones who decide whether they can play in Fiji or not because they have their audiences back home and it is more lucrative for them to play matches against bigger sizes in New Zealand and Australia.

In one time, Madam Speaker, we set out to get a team where we would have to pay about half a million pounds, yes if I remember correctly. So, yes, that is the reality of the game today, but if you are spending money, \$4 million dollars to bring in teams to come and play in Fiji, the non-Fijian teams, I think it is better spent if you bring in top sides to play against our boys. And of course, Madam Speaker, I just want to congratulate our boys who are also playing in the world stage.

Over the weekend, we saw Joe Cokanasiga playing for England and he scored a few tries and I think he cemented his position in the English side now and so into the years to come. And of course, he was playing against the Fijian boys from Australia, and our boys now, Madam Speaker, I think are well positioned to perform at the World Cup in 2019.

Madam Speaker, on the General Elections, I was very concerned about the low voter turnout and I think if anything, this is a sad indictment of the work of the Fiji Elections Office.

It is known that almost 180,000 people did not turn out to vote, after having registered, given their cards but somehow could not make it to the booth to vote. With a country like Fiji, small, with connectivity that is well, reasonably developed, it makes no sense that the turnout was so huge.

In 2014, Madam Speaker, it was about 91,000 who did not vote. It has grown, almost doubled four years later. I would challenge the FEO to look into this and find out why our people did not go to vote, is it a sense of apathy? What can we do to motivate them?

In my church, Madam Speaker, a few days before the Elections, our Pastor felt that there was apathy within the congregation and he spoke to them. He said; "go out and vote, it is your civic duty, the Bible states for you to go and vote to support the government."

He addressed them on the technical issues and what they should do. It was amazing, Madam Speaker, with a number of people in the congregation who did not know. They heard about it on the radio, they read about it in the newspapers, but just that motivation to go and do it, changed where one is voting and all that stuff.

And I would ask the FEO and I will ask us all to try and motivate, to try and ask some of the churches, the *vanua* to help our people get motivated to go and vote - our *Turaga ni Koro*. But unfortunately, today, the *Turaga ni Koro*, if you approach him on something like this, he is confused. He says; "I am not allowed to participate in politics". Church ministers even say "we are not allowed to talk about politics at all." But there is a distinction between the two; to motivate them to do their civic duty and to support a political party. I think if you can motivate them to use the podium to get our people to go and vote, we can have a better turnout next time. This is what I observed today, obviously, Madam Speaker, that concerned me very, very seriously.

And, Madam Speaker, we have a new Parliament today, the victory speeches from the other side and the celebration which is deserved, but when you look at the configuration of the Chamber - one side has grown bigger, one side has diminished in size. So where is the victory?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Where is the victory? We have grown bigger and you have grown smaller. How can you say you have a victory? It is a progressive thing, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- But you know 27-24, and as I said yesterday, 227,000,241 voted for FijiFirst, 227,094 did not vote for FijiFirst. Only 147 - it is a very thin margin. So what it behoves us, Madam Speaker, is to appeal to the other side to have a change of attitude. Attitude that is more inclusive, attitude that will bring about a Parliament that is fully responsible to the people, not one that only FijiFirst wants dominate.

The voters are telling us in very specific terms that they do not want you to continue to behave the way you were behaving in the last four years. I am putting this across, Madam Speaker, and we want the Standing Orders to reflect the parliamentary democracy that we all subscribe to. It was very sad that over the last four years, they changed the Standing Orders four times and done in a manner that can be best described as furtive. I mean, this is all part of what the voters are telling us, "Do it fairly."

What we hear from the voters, Madam Speaker, was that, they want change. They want a change, and I suspect if the 180,000 had voted, some people would have been sitting either this side or not in this House at all.

Madam Speaker, while I am on that, as part of this, can we have more sittings of Parliament? We used to have more sittings and then it went down to 20 days. You call the shots, but I think the voters want you to call more sittings of Parliament because otherwise and I hate to say this, it will be a very efficient Parliament working on a minimal programme.

Madam Speaker, let me touch a bit about tourism. It is now a \$2 billion industry or soon to be a \$2 billion industry. I just want, Madam Speaker, as I have been saying over the last four years, reward the landowners adequately and I am heartened by the independent Land Tribunal that has been set up and I know it is a result of what we have been asking for in the last four years. You have finally listened, that there is a Tribunal that will look into some of these issues.

Madam Speaker, some of the leases that are paid by the hoteliers to landowners go back some 40 years, and some are still only 2 percent of gross. The Tribunal, when you set up, should be used to relook at this.

Madam Speaker, 2 percent, 40 years ago, should now change to something better and indeed, the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTTLTB) is now looking at 5 percent of gross. It is part of a progressive plan by iTLTB, and I would like this Tribunal to be set up to look into it immediately. Madam Speaker, 5 percent should be the minimum for landowners.

We are talking about a \$2 billion industry, Madam Speaker, and the growth will also be overwater bungalows and I am always saddened that the *qoliqoli* because it is owned by the State, which is fine at this time, but the Government must collect that lease from the operator and pay that to landowners. *Qoliqoli*, once it is gone, is gone forever, Madam Speaker. So that could be one way of ensuring that the resource owners are well compensated.

Madam Speaker, on service fee, I brought a petition to Parliament for the service fee to be paid to our workers. Service fee is paid to hotel workers in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. For some reason, the FijiFirst Government believes that our people in tourism do not deserve it. They killed that petition in Committee, you will remember that, Madam Speaker.

I will bring it up again, Madam Speaker, and for this time, I would urge the people from the other side to support this petition and make sure that when you talk about \$2 billion, we are also including rewards for landowners and for our staff. Madam Speaker, we have major companies in Fiji, who also operate in Asia, who have this system in place. They can very easily bring it to Fiji.

Madam Speaker, on aviation, we all know that the world is going through a shortage of pilots. We need to train more pilots and we need to look at a better way of funding this. Tertiary Education Loans Scheme (TELS) is too difficult for some of our trainee pilots, and I would urge this House to look at a way of mass producing or producing more pilots for our national airline and for Fiji. There is definitely a shortage of pilots worldwide and once our people are qualified, they will be poached by bigger airlines, as we see today. Quite a number of Fijians are now flying airlines in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

Madam Speaker, I was so glad that we have stopped funding the golf thing. Over five years, we spent \$45 million for the wealthy to come and play four days of golf in Natadola. When I campaigned in that part of the world, Madam Speaker, I was saddened. I spoke about an indo-Fijian lady who I saw throwing a bucket into the well with a rope, that was only a few kilometres from Natadola. I went through villages like, Vusama, Naivisabasaba, Batiri, Lomawai, Vavinaqiri; they have huge water problems, Madam Speaker.

If you have spent that \$45 million on water from Sanasana to Yako, the water system there would be like what we enjoy in the cities, Madam Speaker. That was \$45 million dollars down the drain, spent very carelessly by the FijiFirst Government.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I understand! I understand promotions, Madam Speaker, that was a con-job.

Madam Speaker, for my new colleagues, I enjoyed some motions that I brought into the floor last time and we hope that you will also do that. I can take credit for the roadside stalls, that was my motion and they opened that in Cuvu.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I spoke on that and the Honourable Leader of Opposition supported me. It took it two years to do it. I know what they do, Madam Speaker, they listen to what we say, add words, and they wave to you and they repackage it and make it their own.

(Laughter)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you for the roadside stalls. Every time I drive past, I see all the stalls I said, "Oh thank you Parliament", and thank you that I was given the opportunity to do that, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Turaga ni Koro is happy with the increase in his pay. That was my motion and was supported by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I just wish for this one, as soon you get something good from us, you do it right away. Do not wait for two years and then bring it in as yours. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I was the one, Madam Speaker, who wanted TELS to be abolished, my motion and university would be free. I know that FijiFirst will never do that but I am glad that other political parties have embraced that and in no time, TELS will be gone, our people will not be carrying any burden and university education is free.

But that, my new colleagues, is what you can do in Parliament. Do not worry about the leadership because they will take it eventually and pre-package it, but the credit is yours.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, let me just conclude by saying that the next four years, for any government, there are two major significant issues that you need to really take hold of and address. The first one is the economic empowerment of the *i Taukei*. We make about 60 percent of the population but only control 20 percent of the capital. Bring that up, you lift the GDP, it is good for this country. It is not communalism, it is not whatever they call it, but is something that is here that needs to be done. It is the elephant in the room that I have always said in most of my speeches. You bring that up, Madam Speaker, that is the way forward for this country.

The second one, Madam Speaker, is managing the relationship between the landlord and the tenant. That is basically what Fiji is. The landlords are people who own the land and the tenants are people who use it. You manage this properly and you improve it, that is the way Fiji will progress.

We have these two issues going forward, Madam Speaker; firstly, empower the *i Taukei* economically and secondly, manage and improve the relationship between the landlord and the tenant. With that, Madam Speaker, this Fiji can be really fruitful and very prosperous.

Madam Speaker, that is my contribution today. Let me just hope that we can all listen next time and take on all these good things and move forward.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members at this point we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Please, note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members of the House Committee are also reminded of their meeting now at the Small Committee Room. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; it is a great honour and privilege indeed to be standing here in front of you all distinguished Members of Parliament to make my inaugural speech.

Firstly, Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your reappointment as the Speaker of Parliament. Having worked with you previously at the Ministry of Health during the late 1980s, I know how talented, efficient and transparent you were in your work. These, I have seen you continued to implement in your current role as a Speaker of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank His Excellency the President of Fiji for his most gracious and inspiring Address. Many of the areas of His Excellency's Address touched upon raising our living standards and making our life better.

Madam Speaker, I graduated from the Fiji School of Medicine in 1975. After my internship at the Lautoka Hospital, I was posted to your home island of Ono-i-Lau, to serve the compulsory rural attachment programme for doctors. This is where I began to learn the art of medicine and the importance of public health which is essential for every doctor. This is also where I learnt that the delivery of health services should be people-centred and not focussed on health facilities or doctors, nurses and medicines only.

I would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge the people of Ono-i-Lau for giving me this great and historic opportunity in my life which built a strong foundation for the rest of my professional career. This is also where I have learnt to live and respect the culture and tradition of our *i Taukei* brothers and sisters. They also taught me fishing and kayaking, and survival skills to live in the remotest places in the world.

Madam Speaker, after serving the people of Fiji for 20 years from 1976 to 1996 in the capacity of a Medical Officer, Sub-Divisional Medical Officer, Divisional Medical Officer, Assistant Director and Director of Primary and Preventive Health Services. I joined the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1996 to assist developing countries such as Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Mongolia and China to strengthen their healthcare services and improve the lives of poor and vulnerable families and communities.

Madam Speaker, my heartfelt thanks to the Regional Director of the World Health Organisation Western Pacific Region, Dr. Shin Young Soo and many of my WHO Country Representatives who supervised my work and gave me the opportunity to contribute to the Global Health Initiatives in many developing countries. Our goal was to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities especially those who are poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Madam Speaker, I will be failing in my duty and consciousness if I do not take time to thank some of the great pioneers of Fiji's health services. These are the people who laid such a strong and unshakable foundation of our nation's health service on which we are continuing to build and improve day by day. They should never be forgotten.

The late Dr. Apenisa Kurisaqila, who was the longest serving Minister for Health and then became the Speaker of Parliament was such a humble and distinguished health professional, who gave an outstanding contribution to establish primary healthcare in our country. I had the opportunity to travel

widely in his company to the islands in the Lau Group, Lomaiviti, Kadavu and Yasawa's and the highlands and interior of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu understanding the basic health needs of our people and communities and used primary healthcare as an approach to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates, improve water and sanitation and control epidemic diseases. I salute late Dr. Kurisaqila for being my mentor and also teaching me some of the essential requirements for a political career.

Dr. Kurisaqila taught me that if you ever join politics, never expect to get anything in return from the country or the people but only to think in terms of providing selfless service.

Madam Speaker, my teachers at the Fiji School of Medicine, University of Otago in New Zealand, University of Sydney in Australia and other health academic institutions around the world provided me with the knowledge and skills and taught me the essential requirements to be a good and a caring doctor. They deserve a special mention, and I acknowledge their contribution in shaping my professional career.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank all those unsung healthcare workers including doctors, general practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, laboratory and x-ray technicians and other paramedical staff who are tirelessly working in most challenging situations especially in rural and remotest places to provide healthcare to our population.

Madam Speaker, I witnessed the 1987 military *coup* first hand. The 1987 military *coup* saw a massive brain drain of our experienced and dedicated human resources from many of our government departments in Fiji. This included our most experienced health specialists like Dr. Karam Singh, Dr. Parshu Ram, Dr. Bhupendra Pathik, Dr. Vinod Singh and many more who left the country at a very short notice and now are working abroad.

Madam Speaker, I sincerely thank our Honourable Prime Minister, Josaia Bainimarama for his courage, vision and foresight in bringing back our beloved country to the path of democracy and establishing back the fundamental human rights of its people, giving national identity "Fijian" to all the citizens of this country and providing equal rights to all without distinction of race, colour or creed.

Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama-led Government during the last four years, has also concentrated on bridging the gap between rich and poor by providing tax incentives, free education, free health services such as free medicines and free consultation at public hospitals, subsidise treatment for chronic diseases and welfare assistance to the elderly and people with disability.

All these initiatives, Madam Speaker, have created great confidence in our country, not only among our local people but our international partners as well.

In the health sector, I have seen that there is a great interest amongst some of our specialist doctors and other healthcare workers who have left the country during the difficult days. They now want to return and help strengthen our health services once again.

Madam Speaker, one such group of doctors who are experts in tertiary care especially open-heart surgery, renal transplants and treatment for cancers have even developed proposals to establish a world class tertiary care health facility in Fiji with full ranges of diagnostic and therapeutic services so that our patients who need such care can be treated here close to their homes. They have a proposal to attract 40 or so of our local doctors who had left and others to return to Fiji and support develop tertiary health services.

Madam Speaker, such confidence in our country was created by the Bainimarama Government that has already led our international health partners such as the Heart International in Nadi and the MIOT

Private Hospital in Suva to establish state of the art specialist cardiac and other health services locally which people can access easily.

We also have recently entered into a Public Private Partnership with the Australian ASPEN Hospital. This partnership will ensure that a number of clinical procedures currently not available in Fiji will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is all because of our noble Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Bainimarama and I would like to thank him whole-heartedly once more.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to note and acknowledge the vast contribution made by the friends of Fiji Heart Foundation led by distinguished Professor Parma Nand, who comes from Labasa. Dr. Parma Nand continues to support our health services by bringing in a large number of heart specialists and support paramedic staff and treat adult and aediatric patients who need cardiac care at zero cost to our patients. On behalf of the people of Fiji, I would like to salute and thank Dr. Parma Nand and his dedicated team of specialist doctors, nurses and administrators for such a great foresight and worthy cause.

Madam Speaker, I retired from active service after 18 years of being away, working with the World Health Organisation in several developing countries. I chose to retire and live in Fiji only because of our Honourable Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama who made us feel that Fiji is our home, gave us a common national identity and treated us equally in all respects. I live in the most beautiful province of Nadroga, known for the friendliness of its people and vast resources. I thank the people of the province for preserving such characteristics.

I had no intention to join politics especially after spending 38 long years as a national and international civil servant serving the people around the world.

Madam Speaker, the policies, plans and strategies put in place by the current Government to make Fiji a modern nation, one of the best in the world where there is dignity, safety and security for all citizens touched my heart. This made me join politics and chose FijiFirst as the party to contest the 2018 General Elections.

Madam Speaker, being away from home for 18 years and only returning to resettle here during the last four years was not an easy task to win the hearts of our people and win a seat in Parliament. I think it was the God's wish to call me to contest these Elections.

I pray and thank the Lord for giving me this opportunity to serve the people of Fiji. This would have been a very proud moment for my late parents, Mr. and Mrs. Shiu Govind of Olosara, Sigatoka, who were cane farmers and struggled to get me educated. Madam Speaker, again thanks to the Bainimarama Government for providing free education for all. Many children like me can now reap the benefits of free education and have better jobs.

Madam Speaker, it is my humble duty to thank everyone, including my voters, supporters and campaign staff who worked day and night tirelessly to organise and implement my campaign successfully. It was not an easy task as we went around the country looking for support, many had forgotten me and many friends and families were not there anymore.

My special thank you goes to my campaign team, consisting of Mr. Esu Nandan, Mr. Kasi Ram, Ms. Neelam Ram, Mr. Divneel Sharma and Mr. Mohd Alim, Madam Speaker, behind the success of every man, there is a woman. This is extremely true of my success as well. My dear wife, Dr. Nalin Sharma Govind who is present here in the gallery today, she is a psychiatrist and mental health specialist. She has also worked in Fiji's health service previously at the St. Giles Hospital and now looking forward to support mental health services in our country.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- She was the pillar of my campaign and helped provide me with not only the logistical support but the much needed psychological and social support that every candidate needs in an elections like last. I thank her for being such a great inspiration for me throughout the campaign.

My two children, Madam Speaker, Mr. Anitesh Ram Govind, a Solicitor with the Auckland City Council and Ms. Nitika Shalini Govind who is studying medicine in Australia were of tremendous help and provided me distance support in terms of their advice. Madam Speaker, let me tell Parliament and the people of Fiji that I have not joined politics to seek any glory, honour or pride. I have decided to join politics with only one goal and that is to share my vast experience in health and provide you with my humble service so that you enjoy your life to the fullest.

I look forward to collaborating closely with the Honourable Minister for Health, Honourable Dr. Waqainabete and his Assistant Minister, Honourable Alexander O' Connor, and their team to implement strategies and plans to achieve quality health service and not health service alone, which can be easily accessible and affordable to the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, our Prime Minister has shown the world that he is the champion, leading the fight against climate change and its effects on people, including the impact on health is a major global issue, and is the talk in every country. We all have to contribute to this debate so that solutions can be found and we prevent some of the consequences rather than wait for the cure of its devastating effects.

Madam Speaker, for the first time in the history of Fiji our Honourable Prime Minister has highlighted a public health issue of global significance at the highest political level, the United Nations General Assembly. The prevention and control of Non-Communicable Diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, preventable cancers and road traffic injuries were discussed at the United Nations General Assembly this year by our Honourable Prime Minister, and this caught the attention of world leaders.

This will help us build partnerships and mobilise resources in the fight against these dreaded diseases in Fiji. This is urgently needed in our country and I plead to all our Honourable Members, including our Opposition Members to actively support this move.

Madam Speaker, our Government has embarked on so many policies and programmes across different sectors which will positively impact on our health and well-being. Improvement of water and sanitation, roads and transport, free education, free health services including increasing accessibility of essential health services to our rural population through the utilisation of our general practitioners, a free wide range of essential medicines to those who cannot afford it and strengthening tertiary care through private-public partnership.

Madam Speaker, health is a complex issue and should be every body's business. The common myth is that health is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, doctors and nurses; this is not true, let me tell you. As an individual, our families, communities, non-governmental sector, the private sector and all government agencies and ministries, health is our responsibility, and we should all actively put health at the centre of all our development agenda and implement healthy policies.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to quote what the late President of South Africa, President Nelson Mandela once said while addressing the World Leaders, and I quote:

“Hours of deliberation without fruitful action on the ground is time tragically wasted.”

Madam Speaker, this is precisely what is in the minds of our government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Honourable Frank Bainimarama. We do not only talk but ensure that our policies have to be effectively implemented on the ground, so that our people, especially those that are disadvantaged and poor, benefit and improve their lives.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with you and my fellow Members of Parliament. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Anare Jale.

HON. A. JALE.- Madam Speaker, I join other Honourable Members of the House in congratulating you on your appointment as Speaker of this august House, and I also congratulate the Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar. I congratulate the Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka on his appointment as the Leader of the Opposition.

The Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Rabuka ably led our Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) in the 2018 General Elections, winning an additional six more seats than we did in the 2014 Elections. This, I believe, Madam Speaker, is a reflection of the shift in the minds and hearts of the voting population. Madam Speaker, I share His Excellency's sentiments in being proud to see the record number of women in this Parliament. I congratulate the ten female Parliamentarians on both sides of the House which would extend to 11 if we include you, Madam Speaker. Again, I believe this is a reflection of another shift in the minds of our voting population.

Madam Speaker, Gender Equality is the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal No. 5, and one of the targets is ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. So our 21 percent achievement of women, including you, Madam Speaker, in Parliament will be recorded as an historical achievement in Fiji's voluntary national review when we report on our Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress to the United Nations in July of next year.

Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that in 26 countries, women now hold about 30 percent of seats in national parliaments in at least one chamber. We are heading in that direction and should strive to achieve this in our Fiji Parliament.

Madam Speaker, we should also actively consider how more youths can be supported and resourced to become Parliamentarians to serve with and be mentored by older, more experienced Parliamentarians. Our latest Census revealed that half of Fiji's population are below the age of 27.5 years and 69 percent, almost 70 percent are below the age of 40. The meaningful engagement of youths is critical, not just as registered voters to cast their votes on Election Day but in the process of nation-building such as being a part of deciding policies and laws in this august House which affect future generations.

Madam Speaker, I am one of the new faces in the House referred to by His Excellency but my road to become a Member of Parliament has not been without challenges. My story is one of struggles, perseverance, tolerance and resilience. After serving Government as a civil servant for 36 years at the highest level, my career was abruptly and prematurely ended with my removal from my office during the 2006 Military Coup and I am one of those individuals who fell victim without redress to any compensation for my remaining period of contract. I was left unemployed and unrecognised. Recognising

my experience and expertise, I was sought after by the Government of Solomon Islands to reform its Public Service under the Regional Assistant Mission to the Solomon Islands.

Madam Speaker, I would like to note here that there are many experienced and highly-qualified Fijians working abroad who would return to Fiji given the opportunity. There is no need for the large number of expatriates who are serving in various sectors of our economy when we have our own people, qualified and able. Interestingly, Madam Speaker, I received a letter in December, 2010 from the Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs conferring upon me with the concurrence of the Prime Minister, the title of Ambassador in recognition of my contribution to the development and progress of our nation, during my appointment as Fiji's representative and Head of Mission in capitals I have served in, however, my diplomatic passport was confiscated at the airport on one of my return visits from the Solomon Islands. No reason given except that that was through an instruction from above.

In 2013, I commenced my preparation for the 2014 General Elections but was disqualified because I did not meet the newly-introduced amendment of residential qualification just prior to the close of nomination at that time. It was a big blow as I had invested heavily in the campaign for the 2014 Elections but continued to serve our SODELPA Party faithfully.

Madam Speaker, I have not left the country since my disqualification at the nomination for 2014 Elections, determined to stand again for the 2018 General Elections and praise be to God and my Lord Jesus Christ, that I stand here today to continue to serve the people of Fiji as a Member of Fiji Parliament, and I look forward to receiving back my diplomatic passport or be issued with a new one.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, I have made it to Parliament through the support of numerous people and I take this opportunity to acknowledge some of them. I would like to make special acknowledgement of the people of the Lau Province in the islands and those living in other divisions and urban areas, who were steadfast in their overwhelming support to see me into Parliament.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, I wish to record the loss to the *Vanua* of Lau as we mourn the late Adi Ateca Mara Ganilau, the eldest daughter of the late Tui Nayau, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Lady Ro Lala Mara, who, today, was flown to her final resting place in the *Vanua Vakaturaga o Lalagavesi*. I respectfully ask for our prayers for the Chiefly Household of Lau.

Madam Speaker, having spent my later school days in Tovata and being a resident of Nasinu, I had also received strong support from the Central Division and a special mention of the *Liuliu ni Yavusa*, Matanikorovatu, Kalabu and the *Radini Yavusa*; Members of the Duituturaga and the Saurua family from Lakeba, Lau; the Bagasau family and *Mataqali* Samale from Ono-i-Lau; my campaign team (Ratu Lote Vuca, Mr. Rupeni Vakamoce, Mr. Enele Malele and Mr. Yavala Tuivakano); and the Lakeba 598 Team (Mr. Roko Liwaki, Mr. Onoitoga, Mr. Tamani and Ms. Lanieta).

Madam Speaker, I thank family members and supporters abroad and a special mention of the SODELPA Tovata Branch in California in the United States, for their contribution to my campaign. I also acknowledge the support and prayers of the Ministers and congregation of the Centenary Methodist Church in Suva which I belong to.

Madam Speaker, I cannot avoid acknowledging the critical and instrumental role of my wife, Ms. Emele Duituturaga Jale, who worked tirelessly to oversight and shoulder my campaign and being there for me and also the SODELPA Party. To her, I am truly grateful.

Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate His Excellency the President for His Address when opening Parliament on Monday, 26th November, 2018. His Excellency had reconfirmed to the House that the people of Fiji comes first and that their deeds and concerns should direct the policies and development plans of the Government.

During my Election campaign, many issues were brought to my attention, some of which I would like to highlight which I am keen to address as a parliamentarian.

Madam Speaker, there has to be concerted effort for the empowerment of all rural and outer island communities. Today, 413,000 people or 46 percent of our total population reside in rural areas. Many rural communities have yet to share the fruits of economic growth and development highlighted in His Excellency's Address. Most rural and maritime communities are still denied access to basic services and utilities. Less than two thirds of rural households access to water supply and sanitation.

Madam Speaker, the maritime provinces have been suffering for years from lack of suitable shipping services to service those provinces, irregular boat services, lack of suitable areas to sleep, insufficient holds for dry cargo and refrigerated goods to be brought to urban areas to be sold. The proceeds help the islanders to meet their financial commitments and needs.

Madam Speaker, the government invest millions of dollars on roads around the island of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, noting especially the servicing of tourism and hotel spots. Rightfully, it is the Government's responsibility but this has not been the case in providing shipping and transportation services to maritime areas as well as the upgrade of wharfs.

Madam Speaker, I wish to make special mention here about the wharf in Lakeba, which is in urgent need of repairs and expansion. The collapse of one side of the wharf poses a real danger to the people at present and I stand ready to work with the respective Honourable Ministers and civil servants to attend to this urgent problem.

Madam Speaker, the rural to urban drift is a major concern to those maritime provinces. Unless the Government initiate and support economic activities to support the maritime population, more and more people will move to urban centres to find employment. The trend must be arrested and stopped to avoid maritime villages becoming ghost villages.

Madam Speaker, it is commendable that His Excellency refers to the rapid pace of development have never before experienced, however, there seems to be uneven progress.

With respect to electrification, there are still rural areas that have not been connected to FEA (now EFL) grid or other forms of renewable energy. For example in Waibau, only 20 kilometers from Suva - posts have been installed and wires are connected to homes but still no electricity.

On roads, in peri-urban areas like Tovata and Kalabu, on the Nasinu corridor, there are no proper bus stops, poor road condition and poor street lighting. The people of Kalabu lease their land for crushing to produce gravel used for construction of roads around Fiji but yet the condition of roads remain poor and below standard. This inequity must be addressed as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker, it is our joint responsibility as Parliamentarians to see to the reduction of the high cost of living for all Fijian families. This was a repeated message from the public during my election campaign - people are struggling to make ends meet. The cost of basic food items and zero-VAT should be reconsidered since a big part one's income is spent on feeding families.

The National Minimum Wage for unskilled workers must be increased to alleviate those falling further below poverty line. It does not help that the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS) has committed young people to mortgage size debts even before finding employment. Job insecurity, short term contracts and lowering the compulsory of retirement age to 55 compound the financial hardship faced by many.

Madam Speaker, the struggle to live day-to-day, experienced by a fair number of Fijian families, has manifested in numerous social ills such as family violence, drug addiction and crime. Government alone cannot attend to these growing problems and increased support must be given to civil society organisations, NGOs, charitable trusts, churches and religious organisations to assist in addressing and arresting these social problems.

Madam Speaker, in His Excellency's Address, His Excellency made reference to the political discourse on the topic of indigenous rights, suggesting dangerous and hateful rhetoric stoking fear, sowing division and fuelling unwarranted animosity. But, Madam Speaker, I am not clear on the reasons why the Fijian Government has not endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People (UNDRIP). The UNDRIP after all is the United Nations benchmark of the minimum standard to uphold the rights of the indigenous people. It is applicable to all member states of the United Nations. Until our Government embraces UNDRIP and implements ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous People and Tribal People as a basic human right, emotions will continue to run high in the absence of such legal frameworks.

Madam Speaker, we must negotiate a Fiji that respects, protects and safeguards the rights of the indigenous people as set out in the UNDRIP framework while guaranteeing the rights of all who have come to call Fiji home. This, Madam Speaker, I believe is the cornerstone of our representative democracy in the next four years of this Parliament.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish to reaffirm my commitment to make it a valuable and meaningful contribution to a robust and constructive debate in this august Chamber for the term of this Parliament. I thank you for allowing me to contribute to this motion. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, may I first thank the President, His Excellency, for his Address yesterday at the Opening of this term of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, let me also congratulate you on your appointment and your Deputy, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar. We, on this side, Madam Speaker, look to you to fulfil your duties in a fair and balanced way.

I also congratulate the Government and encourage it to reverse the anti-democratic trends and rules imposed on the 2014 Parliament through the 2013 Constitution and the four amendments to the Standing Orders. We are trying Madam Speaker, as a nation, to move further towards democracy; not to retreat from it.

My sincere congratulations to those on the Opposition benches. You fought a good Elections fight against great odds. I extend my personal best wishes to the new Leader of the Opposition. We worked together well during the campaign and will continue in that spirit of cooperation. The Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni L. Rabuka has proved that he is the right man in the right place at the right time.

(Acclamations)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I predict, Madam Speaker, he will rise to greater heights and will be on the Government side as Prime Minister one day very soon. I sincerely thank the chiefs and the people of Rewa. I thank in particular, my outstanding campaign team, especially the youths and those who honoured me with their votes.

I also thank my family and relatives. I pledge that I will do everything in my power to look after their interests. Although this is my fourth term in Parliament and it will definitely be my last, there are younger talented people coming up through the SODELPA ranks and it is important for them to be given space to grow and utilise their talents in the service of Fiji.

It gives me great joy and happiness to see an increasing number of women joining our ranks in Parliament. They have so much to contribute Madam Speaker, being multi-skilled and multi-talented and I pray that the members will keep increasing to also reflect the 50 percent of our population.

Madam Speaker, let there be no mistake about it. The ground has moved under the feet of FijiFirst. The FFP party and its leaders are weakened; it is the beginning of the end for them. They lost a large number of votes, Madam Speaker, to SODELPA ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- ... and their seats total dropped significantly; in fact their majority is by a very slim margin.

I will explain in a moment, Madam Speaker, some of the reasons for the political decline on the Honourable Prime Minister and his party. First though, I must comment on their campaign. They completely, Madam Speaker ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- Tell us, what was your vote?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- It was more than yours.

(Laughter)

They completely trashed their accepted convention of an incumbent government going into caretaker mode before the Elections. That is what normally happens in a democracy, Madam Speaker, and that is why His Excellency the President was referring to yesterday as a democracy being a precious treasure. But the Honourable Prime Minister and his colleagues blatantly and unethically used Government resources and official engagements to try to gain politically during the campaign period.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, they continue to woe voters with handouts and benefits, a free Wi-Fi...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Please, Honourable Members, we would like to hear Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa's presentation. Please, give her respect so we can all hear.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- ...giveaway bonanza was timed for the Elections and continued until the end. People are not foolish, Madam Speaker.

It was obvious to many that all these were blatant attempts at vote buying but they did not work. It turned to ashes. At this point, we can see that half the voting population did not support the Government. FijiFirst scraped in with a very small majority, in fact by some 147 votes had all parties banded together. That was consistent with the cry for change we heard in so many parts of the country.

I saw the campaign as a battle, Madam Speaker, between David, not the David mentioned by the Honourable Prime Minister early this morning, but the David of the Bible, David and Goliath. FijiFirst was Goliath, stuffed with millions of dollars and backed by the administrative machinery of the state. SODELPA and the smaller parties were David. They were poor with very limited resources but they were fearless, determined and their armour was the truth. They brought Goliath to his knees, Madam Speaker. Next time, he will end up flat on his back. That might be sooner than he thinks.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to now comment on the role of the Prime Minister in the Elections. It is important for this to be brought to the Chamber as a matter of high public interest and accountability. He said, Madam Speaker, that he would fight on the issues and not personalise matters, but he made it very personal. For instance, he called our leader a snake and someone else on this side a beast. Yes, he brought it down to that level of gutter talk. Why does a person, Madam Speaker, have to be so nasty? This is exactly what His Excellency the President had warned us about yesterday that we stay away from a hateful style of politics and it must end because there is no place for it, Madam Speaker, outside of this Chamber or in it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister put *coups* on the Elections agenda; spoke about them constantly and used the word "violence". Very surprisingly, Madam Speaker, he only spoke about two *coups* - 1987 and 2000. There was no mention of the *coup* of 2006 and I wonder why, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Even the Honourable Attorney-General, Madam Speaker, got into the act and predicted economic chaos and loss if Opposition won and even created an image of a dagger held to one's neck - what next?

The Honourable Prime Minister was reluctant to rule out another *coup*. He urged when challenged by our leader to hold his hand over his heart and renounce *coups*. He could not do it. He refused to answer a journalist who more than once asked him whether he would accept the Election results. All he would say was that he would be very disappointed if he did not win.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- So?

HON. RO T,V, KEPA.- So, he left the possibility of the *coup* hanging there and this is what His Excellency the President said yesterday, Madam Speaker.

"For us to not bring about fear-mongering and hateful style of politics into any conversation that we have."

The Honourable Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, does not listen to that type of advice as he was frightening people and playing on ethnic fears. These were extreme and shameful tactics. Shame on you, Honourable Prime Minister!

(Chorus of interjections)

When he went into campaign, he spoke of winning all 51 seats in Parliament and he thought this was a bit ambitious. So, he dropped his forecast to 42. He could only managed 27 for a majority of three and that, Madam Speaker, might yet change.

(Laughter)

On another note, an episode during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan Markle, disturbed me very much. It was another example of the efforts by the Honourable Prime Minister and his political colleagues to erode and marginalise the culture and traditions of the indigenous people of Fiji.

I made a statement about that, which sparked an overwhelming reaction. Because of its significance I am going to reiterate parts of each here and it should be in the record of Parliament, Madam Speaker, as many times he does not speak like a gentleman.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Perhaps someone on the Government side can explain why the Honourable Prime Minister is not sympathetic at all to the desire of one small indigenous community in this world to survive and preserve its customs, heritage and history. I have asked them to join with us in removing this unjust anti-indigenous rule.

One of the latest manifestations of the FijiFirst attitude is to deny us of statistics on how many indigenous Fijians there are. That tells us that there is an obsession at work here.

Madam Speaker, although His Excellency President yesterday tried to reassure us that indigenous issues were safe, the reality is quite different. And I, therefore, I appeal from my heart to non-indigenous communities of our land to understand our fears and concerns in light of the fate of native peoples here and elsewhere.

We must rid Fiji of the false notion spread by the Bainimarama-led Government that whenever we raise these issues we are being racists, which is about our rights as indigenous peoples of this country. That accusation simply strengthens our commitment to our cause about our rights and it is not a privilege. I think, Madam Speaker, it was the late Great Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara who said that Fijians wished to make history, not become history. We simply wish to exist and to flourish and live in harmony in a nation defined by unity, respect and love of neighbour.

Madam Speaker, may I briefly touch on the three confederacies - Kubuna, Burebasaga and Tovata.

The Tui Cakau, Madam Speaker, who is Head of Tovata is one of my colleagues on this side. My position as Roko Tui Dreketi places me as the Head of Burebasaga and today, as was alluded to by Honourable Anare Jale, we mourn the death of our *Vasu Levu* to *Burebasaga*, Adi Ateca Moceiwaqa Mara Ganilau, and we pray that her soul rest in peace.

The confederacies, Madam Speaker, are very much a part of indigenous culture and tradition. On momentous public occasions, such as the visit last month by Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan Markle, the Duke and the Duchess of Sussex, the Confederacies through long held custom are formally represented in ceremonies and rituals, one of which is the *veiqaravi vakavanua*. The indigenous people understand and appreciate this.

When planning was underway for hosting the Duke and Duchess, I received a visit from Officials of the Ministry of i Taukei Affairs. They made customary presentations and invited the Burebasaga Confederacy to participate in the ceremonies of welcome or the *veiqaravi vakavanua* for the royal couple. I accepted the invitation on behalf of the Chiefs and people of my Confederacy, to be part of the rituals to be performed.

Prince Harry, Madam Speaker, will always occupy a special place in Fiji as he is a direct descendent of Queen Victoria. The High Chiefs of Fiji on 10th October, 1874, ceded our islands to the great Queen, her heirs and successors. Just as Prince Harry's ancestry goes directly back to Queen Victoria, I am a direct descendent of the Roko Tui Dreketi of 1874, a signatory to the Deed of Cession. The Tui Cakau, the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu who sits with me here, is also directly a descendent from the Tui Cakau, who signed the Deed on that day. I must also mention that the Tui Namosi, the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, another Opposition Member is a direct descendent of a Deed signatory.

That solemn moment in Levuka, Madam Speaker, changed our history. It rings down through the generations. I understood from the Ministry of I Taukei Affairs delegation that they had approached the Kubuna Confederacy that I be accepted to be part of the royal welcome. The Ministry Officials indicated they were intending to make a similar presentation to the Tui Cakau as Head of Tovata.

Three weeks later, Madam Speaker, I received another visit from the Officials. It was again formal in nature, only this time they were visibly embarrassed. In fact, I thought they had their tails between their legs, Madam Speaker. To my surprise, I was told that the invitation extended to Burebasaga Confederacy was now withdrawn. I do not wish to disclose the rest of the conversation.

I later learnt that the Confederacies or the *vanua* would not be mentioned in the royal visit programme. They would instead be replaced by references by the President and the Honourable Prime Minister. There was no proper explanation for this break from established tradition, except that it came from the top, and I am sure the top is sitting here, Madam Speaker.

It is important to note that the welcome ceremony is termed *veiqaravi vakavanua* and not *veiqaravi vaka-Peresitedi se veiqaravi vaka-Prime Minister*, as neither the President nor Prime Minister are part of any *vanua* as in their positions. It is the people of the *vanua*, who carry out this protocol as the royal visitors are in their *vanua*.

There was an attempt to pass the blame to Vuda, Madam Speaker, as is happening now, but that notion is farfetched. Even before I decided to speak out, the news of what had happened spread like wildfire. It is clear to me that the Honourable Prime Minister made that unfortunate decision to exclude the Confederacies and promote his own title. His own response to me is that, I should get my facts right.

Well, perhaps, the Honourable Prime Minister should explain how I am wrong. The decision to bar the Confederacies was unprecedented. I can tell the Honourable Prime Minister and his Members that it cost them very dearly at the polls. The fault lies at his door.

Madam Speaker, we continue to stand strong in defence of customs that define us. There is nothing radical or provocative about that, it is a very natural thing.

Madam Speaker, on another note, during the campaign we came across many young people burdened by Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS). They are settled with huge debts before they even have a job. This is unjust. We seek the Government's co-operation and replace TELS with a scholarship scheme linked....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Madam Speaker, I propose or suggest to the Honourable Akbar, the new Minister for Education, that she looks at the previous ...

(Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- ...the one talking now, that she looks at his records, his promises in 2014, that there be an Education Commission. That is from your mouth, you said that!

(Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Broken promises, broken promises, broken promises!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Only speak when you can be heard Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- *Mosi vei au*, that is why you are talking.

(Laughter)

His speech, Madam Speaker, was received with much anticipation by the stakeholders. Unfortunately, he let them down again and again, and nothing more was heard of the Education Commission from 2014 to 2018.

Education Commission, Madam Speaker ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- What for?

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- ... just to educate him.

(Laughter)

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- ...is set up to examine all aspects of the educational sector in Fiji, to evolve a general pattern of education and to advise guidelines and policies for the development of education in Fiji. The Madam Education Minister should involve the stakeholders, people who are in education sector, business and civic leaders. Together they plan and effect the changes that will improve teaching and learning at all levels from pre-kindergarten through to university settings.

That essentially, Madam Speaker, is what is required as soon as possible in Fiji. Too many misguided reforms, too many ad hoc changes, no planning, everything going wrong, very low literacy and numeracy.

(Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy interjects)

I do not want to draw any more attention to him, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish you, Honourable Speaker and all other Honourable Members in this House, a very Merry Christmas and God's blessings in the New Year.

(Applause)

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

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; *bula, ram ram, asalaamalaykum.*

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank his Excellency the President for his gracious and mighty Address. His Excellency the President reminded all Fijians that country comes first and not yourself, as with the Members of Parliament should always adhere that message in taking our nation forward.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the voters, families and friends, who have put their strong hands for four hectic weeks during my campaign.

A special thanks to Bobby Vikash, who worked tirelessly during my campaign period. His experience in community works and being a well-known person within the Nadi community has helped me a lot.

Also, I would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Jamal for being with me during my campaign and supporting with prayers and speeches, also not forgetting my two beautiful daughters - Siya Kirpal and Shreya Kirpal.

Madam Speaker, I hail from the rural outskirts of Marasa in Nadi. I completed my primary school education at Hindu Maha Sabha Primary School and secondary, I completed my Form Three and Form Four education at Swami Vivekananda High School (SVHS) now Swami Vivekananda College (SVC); while Form Five to Form Seven at Sangam Sadhu Kuppuswamy Memorial College (SSKMC) in Nadi.

After my secondary school education, I joined the Ministry of Lands as a Technical Assistant and during my employment with the Lands Department, I completed my Bachelor's Degree in Land Management and Development and also obtained my registration as a valuer. I spent 13 years at Ministry of Lands before starting my own valuation company named, Professional Valuations Limited, in Year 2005 until to-date.

Madam Speaker, my reason for resigning from the Ministry of Lands was due to nepotism, favouritism and racially-biased promotions which hindered my career for almost four years by the SDL Government in 2005. Over the years, I have worked with various stakeholders, including the private sector, Government organisations, financial institutions, NGOs and members of the public and have provided my knowledge and expertise in areas of land acquisition, subdivision and valuation. The Honourable Anare Jale was at Public Service Commission (PSC) at that time in 2005 and Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa was the Minister for Education.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my parents, Mr. Ram Kirpal and the late Mrs. Bhan Mati, who came from a sugarcane farming background, for my upbringing and their constant support to me, together with my two other siblings in order to complete our primary and secondary education. Life was not easy during my young days as we had to pay our bus fares and school fees. Bus transport was not accessible to my home and we had to work three kilometres to catch the bus.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be a part of the FijiFirst Government which has implemented such policies of free bus fare and free school fees at primary and secondary schools level, so that all Fijians are literate. Literacy is the only means for a better Fiji and as the late Mr. Nelson Mandela said, and I quote:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Madam Speaker, not only education but all other sectors have improved dramatically under the FijiFirst Government and we will continue with these improvements.

Madam Speaker, under the FijiFirst Government another initiative is Strata Title to cater for people's demand to own a property in a highly demanding market. It will also help to increase the rate of home ownership which is a key objective of the FijiFirst Government.

Incentives are also in place for first-time home buyers and many Fijians have already benefitted from this policy and many more will benefit from this scheme in the next four years. Many of our citizens are now proud new home owners. Many of our citizens who were squatters and living under the *vakavanua* arrangements are now proud owners of 99 years of lease.

Madam Speaker, I joined FijiFirst because of its national movement dedicated to the service of our nation and the advancement of wellbeing of all Fijians. I am thankful to the leader of FijiFirst, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Party's Secretary, Honourable Attorney-General, for having faith and trust in me in selecting as a FijiFirst candidate and providing me an opportunity to serve the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I wish all Fijians a merry Christmas and prosperous New Year. God bless Fiji. Thank you, *vinaka, dhanyabaad*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Semi Koroilavesau.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, ladies and gentlemen; first, I would like to thank His Excellency the President for delivering yet another gracious Address and the sentiment he raised on the journey towards a better, modern democratic nation.

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your reappointment and I wish you well. It is with great honour to be back in this august House and at the outset I would like to sincerely thank my family – my dear wife and children for their support. To my close friends and dedicated campaigners thank you for the hard work during the pre-poll period. To the Fijian people especially my voters, thank you for bringing me back and having faith in me to serve you for another term.

Madam Speaker, I wish to provide assurance to the Fijian people that through the FijiFirst Government we will continue to deliver our promises as highlighted in our Manifesto of 2018.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, the current FijiFirst Government is not only here to deliver results but we are here to deliver change to enable us to achieve the much needed results.

Madam Speaker, there have been a lot of misconception on the role of government leading up to the elections. Fake news, false news, false promises, misconceptions have been tools used to try and tip the balance of leadership.

I am however pleased that the people have spoken and through the democratic process we, the Government of the day, will bring security and stability to the nation of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, allow me to touch slightly on the importance of security and stability for our people and our nation. In his Presidential Address yesterday, His Excellency the President stated the importance of honesty. Honesty as a politician and being honest to our electorates while ensuring that the common good of the Fijian people is kept at the forefront.

Whilst having said that, I would like to reiterate that the Government is determined to see this through. Only by doing so we will be able to set the fundamental platform to ensure Fiji's progress through:

- economic growth;
- recognition of basic rights;
- protection of culture, heritage and environment;
- creating a stable future; and
- good governance.

Madam Speaker, stability and ensuring security will allow for a more vibrant future for our nation and the FijiFirst Government is dedicated to achieving this.

At this juncture, allow me to touch briefly on the activities that are involved within the Ministry of Fisheries over the recent past. It is important that before progressing, Honourable Members of this Honourable House understand the basis of fisheries activities within Government and the proper management of fisheries resources, management that ensures the sustainable use of our resources while considering the underlying principle of proper fisheries management.

This approach of an all-encompassing takes into account all stakeholders with the fisheries sector. This is important because consideration is not only given to the private sector but the public sector, customary fishing right owners and the general public. It allows for a more balanced approach in decision-making. Precautionary approach allows for the protection of vulnerable species during uncertainty. At times managers are faced with the daunting task of trying to find the balance between supporting commercial activities against the loss of vulnerable species.

This approach allows the Government to put a stop to all our activities that threaten the survival of vulnerable species which lacks scientific information. Madam Speaker, while mentioning this principle, the Ministry of Fisheries will continue to work to ensure the sustainable harvest of marine resources. This will be a continuation of activities currently undertaken such as the Marine Inventory Survey and the Collation of Scientific Data. This will allow us to address the threats faced by our vulnerable coastal areas and its resources which have been exploited by bad practices. Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries will continue to impose ban and strict control measures on species that are vulnerable and need protection.

In the coming months there would be a review on the current size and catch limits. This is an ongoing activity and is aimed at establishing a more viable catch size for fish species. This initiative will ensure that species are harvested at a size that allows for sustainable recruitment to occur within stock.

Madam Speaker, while there is a lot of pressure fixated on the harvest or wild caught species, the Ministry of Fisheries is determined to propel in more efforts in the development of aquaculture. Over the past year with the assistance of our bilateral and business partners we have been able to revamp and refocus on improving aquaculture.

Madam Speaker, past activities was focused on small to medium scale production. This has its own limit and production is always at a level that has not met the local demand. To address this, the Ministry of Fisheries have secured technicians and appropriate funding to develop new techniques to improve aquaculture activities while investigating the production of suitable fish feed for cultured species.

In particular, Madam Speaker, the commercial production of shrimps and prawns is an area of pinnacle focus. It has been envisaged that after conducting two conferences in the Central and Western Divisions, there still needs to be a lot of work done to involve the private sector. That is why the Ministry would like to inform the august House that we would like to ask for a Government Commercial Company to spearhead the commercial culture of shrimps and prawns. Discussions with line Ministers on the viability of this programme will be done in the coming months. On the other hand, Madam Speaker, there are initiatives currently being undertaken to start culturing other viable finfish.

Madam Speaker, on that note, allow me to share my experience when visiting rural isolated islands. The FijiFirst Government in its Manifesto highlighted the need to improve living standards of all Fijians and that is the reason why my team and I stayed out on the islands at least for three months. In rural isolated islands which include Yadua right up to Naqelelevu, Ono-i-Lau right up to Yacata, Vatulele right to Yasawa-i-Rrara. Those are all the islands that surround Vitil Levu and Vanua Levu.

While I do not agree with the Honourable Anare Jale on the transportation, my information is that transportation and shipping has never been better because of this franchise shipping system. The visit by the ships now is almost 300 percent improvement from the previous years. To improve the standard of living in these areas, the Ministry of Fisheries had begun programmes to allow harvest, storage and sale of marine species to boost their economic activities.

Madam Speaker, to address the issue of fish storage, the Ministry of Fisheries have begun trials on the establishment of solar powered freezers. This will be rolled out in the coming months to allow for communities to store their catch prior to market sales. This, Madam Speaker, are just some areas that the Ministry of Fisheries will continue to work in the current budgetary year.

Madam Speaker, I would like to simply highlight some of the issues that was covered by His Excellency the President. I would like to contribute my five cents worth on the importance of national economy. This is the sale of Kadavu, Madam Speaker. In the *Facebook* they had said that the Ministry of Agriculture has promised to reduce the price of *yaqona*. This is all fake news. The Plastic Levy has been given 10 cents to the Prime Minister and 10 cents to the Attorney-General.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, the national economy and economic growth must be a priority of this august Parliament. Madam Speaker, there have been rigorous debates over the years in the Chamber about how our economy should be run but ultimately these arguments have been decided by the strength of our economy today. Government's record on the economy is one of

historic record and breaking success. It has improved lives for all our people, it means prosperity for all and it means a brighter future for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, we must not undermine the Fijian economy just for political gain. We must talk about our country first and not us as individuals. "To debate by all means and create a battle of ideas because that is the Parliament's function. But to do so with humility, national unity, national interest and common good is always at the forefront of our minds."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker," we have moved our nation forward and realised these wonderful opportunities all while preserving and promoting those that are most essential underpinnings of our cultural identity including the protection of our customs, traditions and land of the *i Taukei* people."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- "I am proud to say that our Constitution grants the strongest ever protection of *i Taukei* land in Fijian history. Because of those protections there is no way the *i Taukei* land in this country can ever be permanently taken or alienated."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- "Not one square centimetre of *i Taukei* land has been lost either under the Bainimarama Government or FijiFirst Government."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, "all of us have solemnly swore on oaths or affirmation our allegiance to defend our democracy. We have sworn to protect our Constitution; the very document that allows us to come into this Parliament and grant us the privilege to speak on behalf of our citizens. A Constitution that guarantees common and equal citizenry. A Constitution that contains invulnerable protection for the continued communal ownership of *i Taukei* land and that recognise the unique culture – the custom, tradition and the language of the *i Taukei*. All of us now have an unbreakable trust with God and the Fijian people to uphold this Constitution."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- "Democracy is enshrined in this Constitution and there is no attack to our democracy more potent than blatant attempts to foster disunity among our people."

Madam Speaker, we need maturity, strong unity and strong leadership. "Leadership is not about picking a popular strategy, if that means straying from the truth, it is not about plain politics, making headlines or landing punches on your opponents at the expense of national interest. Leadership is about speaking the truth even when the truth may be difficult to hear. It is about putting forward real policy that is carefully crafted to create the greatest good of the public. It is about setting a vision today for tomorrow, the year ahead and even generations yet to come. By putting in work that yields long term benefits to our children, their children and the children after that."

Madam Speaker, “unfortunately elections are also about differences because each party seeks to distinguish itself from the other. But now that the campaigning is done, we must come together as a nation to govern for the benefit of all our people. There will be disagreements of course, but we are civilised people, we can manage those disagreements with civility and respect, keeping before us the ideal that we are elected to solve problems and improve the life of every Fijian.”

“In our last 48 years, an independent nation not only for the past four years have lived a nation governed by true democracy. And those four years all rank among the very greatest time in our entire history. You see it, as well as I do, Madam Speaker, that relationship between genuine democracy and prosperity is critically very clear. Our challenge is to make the next 4 years even greater, even more successful for our country, Fiji.” Four years from now, let us aspire to represent the Fiji that is stronger, more vibrant, more prosperous and a people who remain united, committed to a common purpose filled with true love for all our fellow Fijians and the nation. That is true patriotism, that is what patriotism is all about. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. That brings us to the end of the responses for today and we will proceed with the next speaker tomorrow morning. I thank you all for your contributions to the debate.

I also would like to remind Members of the House Committee of our meeting in the Small Committee Room straight after this.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Point of Order – Misleading Statement

HON. SPEAKER.- At this juncture, I would like to make a ruling on the point of order that was raised by the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad this morning.

Honourable Members, you must realise that points of order is made as it applies only to the rules and practices of the House and not on content of any speech or comment. The point of order must be raised at any time during a sitting, and it should be succinct, and is not a presentation of a prepared paper. Therefore, the Point of Order that was raised this morning did not qualify under the Point of Order process. Thank you Honourable Members.

The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.52 p.m.