

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 4TH APRIL, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 4TH APRIL, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.38 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 3rd April, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Urgent Statement of National Importance

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I am allowing a suspension motion to be moved by the Leader of the Government in Parliament. I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. There will be no debate on this motion.

You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, I move:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of the Standing Orders is suspended, so as to allow the Honourable Prime Minister to make an Urgent Statement of National Importance to Parliament and to the nation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, very briefly, given the events that occurred very recently, Government has considered it seriously and would like to inform the nation about the approaches that Government is taking in order to have this sorted immediately and, of course, thus the request for the suspension of the motion under

Standing Order 6, so that the Honourable Prime Minister can deliver his Urgent Statement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Government in Parliament. Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, you had just mentioned that there will be no debate.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have just corrected myself on that and that is why I am giving the floor, unless no one wishes to take the floor now, we can move on.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

At this point in time, the Opposition is actually quite clueless as to what the subject matter is. Perhaps, if the Honourable Prime Minister or the Leader of the Government in Parliament would allude to what it is, we would then have a meaningful debate on it.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue is not about the content of the statement. The motion is about suspending the Orders to allow the Honourable Prime Minister to make a Statement of national importance, and normally statements made by the Honourable Prime Minister is a statement that is obviously an urgent, important matter, and then we hear the statement and then return to the agenda item as per the Standing Orders has set for the Order Paper today.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, that is exactly the point. It is trying to set aside the Standing Orders without understanding what it is for. So to have at least just what it is, then it gives us a more meaningful contribution in terms of whether we are happy with it not. That is exactly the point that is being raised by the Whip of SODELPA, and I am raising the same issue too, Sir. I think it is fair just what it is about, that is all.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is just a statement, not a motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Members, we are debating the process at the moment. Once we get through this and the Honourable Prime Minister takes the floor, you will hear the reason for that. It is not often that we come to this procedure in a Parliament, and those of you who have been Members before, know that it is very rare, and it is done for an important announcement that the Prime Minister wants to make; that is the reason for this. We do not go through this on an everyday basis.

Honourable Bilitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a clarification: we understand that there is an urgent Statement by the Prime Minister, and given that an urgent statement will not have any reply from this side of the House, and again given that you have said that it is just an announcement, whether it will be a statement for thirty minutes or just an announcement of something

important to the nation, of national interest. If no, then he can come around by way of a Ministerial Statement; he wants to make a Statement.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are not debating the process, we are debating the motion that was moved by the Leader of Government in the House, and then we will hear what the Prime Minister has to say; it is a simple process.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect, under Standing Orders 6, in order to suspend a motion, it does require for Parliament's leave to agree to suspending before it is allowed and so we are standing up to ask about the subject matter so that we can agree to it. How can we agree to something that we have not even heard about what the subject matter is, and that is, I now remind this House....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...what the Honourable Member is saying, I want to remind, please, Honourable Members, please, Mr. Speaker, through you, the motion is not about the content, the motion is about suspending the Orders to allow the Prime Minister of the elected Government of Fiji, that as the Head of the Executive, to make a Statement of national importance. It is a Statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Unfortunately, the response by the other side is always demonstrative of their pugnacious competitive behaviour. It is of national importance, a simple issue.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

As I have said before, we are going through the process now. When we had the debate the other day, some wanted this process, some did not want it; the same thing is happening here. You are there to debate the process, not the content. The content will come later and you will be informed, and as I have said before, it is not often and during your time in Parliament, you might have only one occasion for this, it is not often, so the debate goes on.

If there is no one else wishing to take the floor, I will give the floor to the Leader of the House. You have the floor.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I have made it clear that it is just a suspension motion, the Honourable Prime Minister can deliver his Statement and I thank your Office, Sir, for allowing us to move with this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Government in House. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Orders is suspended, so as to allow the Honourable Prime Minister to make an Urgent Statement of national importance to Parliament and to the nation.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

<u>Votes Cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	38
Noes	-	9
Not Voted	-	4

HON. SPEAKER.- The motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

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

URGENT MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Release of New Zealand Journalists

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, this morning, I was informed that three New Zealand Journalists had been detained by the Police for questioning. Upon learning of this situation, the Fijian Government immediately demanded their release.

Mr. Speaker, I understand these Journalists were present in Fiji to report on the recent charges that have been brought against FreeSoul Real Estate Development. Mr. Speaker, it should be made clear that the news media has been an ally in accountability, helping to expose the company's illegal environmental destruction. While FreeSoul is already under investigation for breaches of the Environment Management Act of 2005, they have continued to act in ways that demand the highest levels of public scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with the Commissioner of Police, who has assured me that the detention of these Journalists was an isolated incident undertaken by a small group of rogue officers. A full investigation into why these officers would use such heavy-handed tactics will be undertaken and any violation of protocol or undue influence will be met with appropriate action.

Mr. Speaker, the conduct of FreeSoul Real Estate Development has been deeply concerning to me, personally for some time. As both, a Fijian who treasures our environment and a global advocate for sustainable development, I share in the public's outrage. We need to send a strong message to FreeSoul Real Estate Development and other developers looking to cause us harm that they are not welcome to operate in Fiji. That message needs to be backed by law to prevent repeated offences from bad faith developers. That is why, Mr. Speaker, we have been considering a law which we will urgently introduce in the next session of Parliament to permanently ban companies that blatantly disregard our environmental laws and protection.

I, together with the Minister for Environment and the Commissioner of Police, will meet with the Journalists later today to apologise for the treatment they have received and personally speak with them about our position on the environment, particularly with regards to development.

Mr. Speaker, the Fijian people can be assured, we will not tolerate any attempts to violate the historic environmental protections enshrined in our Constitution, protections that we will build upon with meaningful legislation.

We will continue to lead from the front on this issue, at home and abroad. We will continue to walk the talk for the sake of our environment, for the sake of our way of life and for the sake of all those who come after us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his Statement. Honourable Members, we will now move on.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

I also warmly welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television, internet and listening to the radio.

PL100 Students – USP & Yat Sen Secondary School Students

Honourable Members, we have with us today another group of PL100 students from the University of the South Pacific, and also students from the Yat Sen Secondary School.

I welcome you both most warmly to Parliament. I trust that your stay with us is educational and meaningful and that you will enjoy your visit to Parliament.

Final Year Medical Students – FSM

May I also welcome Assistant Professor Nikhil Munshi and the final year Medical Students from the Fiji School of Medicine. Welcome and thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament. I hope that you will enjoy the proceedings today. All of you are most welcome.

Delay - Daily Hansard

For the information of Honourable Members, the Secretariat is finalising the printing of the *Hansard* Reports and, therefore, you will receive your copies in the course of the proceedings later this morning.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs - Reserve Bank of Fiji - August 2017 to July 2018 Annual Report

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I will be presenting the Reserve Bank of Fiji - August 2017 to July 2018 Annual Report, for your information.

The Committee, upon deliberating on the August 2017 to July 2018 Annual Report, was pleased to note that Fiji's foreign reserves remained above the benchmark, with the foreign reserves level being \$2,161.9 million at the end of July 2018.

Further to this, the Committee was also pleased to note that the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) had made a profit of \$31.5 million in the 2017-2018 financial period. The Committee was satisfied that RBF, as the financial system regulatory authority of Fiji, continues to undertake relevant supervisory activities to ensure the safety and soundness of the Fijian financial system.

The Committee, after scrutinising the Annual Report and consulting with the various stakeholders, made observations and recommendations. The Committee supports the Governor's Statement of the need to gather data on the Small, Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Fiji, considering that about 95 percent of businesses in Fiji are SME businesses.

Further to this, we welcome the initiative of introducing e-services which provides customers with greater ease of access to the services provided by Banks, as IT literacy has significantly improved amongst the population.

In the year to June 2018, tourism earnings grew by 4.6 percent to \$838.5 million, compared to 6.1 percent growth in the same period in June 2017. The Committee further noted that local participation in the tourism industry has also grown significantly.

It was also noted with interest that the Bank works in alignment with Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, the Green Bond Project aligns perfectly with SDG 13 - Climate Action.

Further to this SDG 5 - Gender Equality, was evident. Taking into consideration the principle of Gender Equality, the Committee noted that RBF has taken the initiative to be more gender inclusive. This has been done through collecting disaggregated data from all licensed financial institutions, including insurance companies, in order to better understand and design products and services that are sustainable to the financial needs of Fijian women. Further to this, RBF has also made a commitment under the National Financial Inclusion Strategic Plan (2016 to 2020) to include additional 65,000 women into the formal financial system.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report:

- Honourable Veena Bhatnagar (Deputy Chairperson);
- Honourable George Vegnathan;
- Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau;
- Honourable Inosi Kuridrani; and
- Honourable Viliame Gavoka

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliamentary staff, who have given us invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the RBF August 2017 to July 2018 Annual Report, to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5):

I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to present the Committee's Report.

You have the floor, Sir.

Report of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
RBF Insurance 2017 Annual Report

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Committee is pleased to present its Report on the RBF Insurance 2017 Annual Report.

For the year 2017, the theme was, "Inclusive Insurance" as a way to focus the efforts of various industries stakeholders to increase penetration into the communities and increase uptake on insurance.

Given that the Insurance Act was last reviewed approximately 20 years ago, the Committee was pleased to note that the Act is currently undergoing review. Further to this, there have been discussions about developing other types of insurance, for instance, RBF and a number of working groups, such as the Agricultural Insurance National Working Group chaired by the Governor of the RBF jointly with the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, explored avenues to bring in agriculture insurance in Fiji.

Various aspects were explored while deliberating on this Insurance Report, one of which was to focus on Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The RBF continues to work with the insurance industry to see if they can come up with products and services in this area.

The Committee noted the alarming rate of insurance being surrendered and lapsed due to inability to continue payment which effectively is a direct loss of savings for our people and hope that paths can be paved to overcome this issue.

The Committee welcomes the Fijian Government's initiative of bundle insurance which initially covered sugarcane farmers and now have been extended to rice farmers, dairy farmers, copra farmers, Social Welfare recipients and civil servants.

The Committee is satisfied with the overall performance of the RBF as the regulator of the insurance industry.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report:

- Honourable Veena Bhatnagar (Deputy Chairperson);
- Honourable George Vagnathan;
- Honourable Filipe Tuisawau;
- Honourable Inosi Kuridrani; and
- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliamentary Staff, who gave us invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the 2017 RBF Insurance Annual Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5):

I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence –
Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration Bi-Annual Report - January to July 2016

HON. A.D. O’CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration Bi-Annual Report - January to July 2016.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration Bi-Annual Report, specifically on the Ministry’s operations and administration. This is the first Report by the Ministry to be reviewed by the Standing Committee at this session of Parliament.

The Committee recognises that the Report was put together in haste because of the change in the financial year of Government. The Report is quite basic and does not discuss the Ministry’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This made it difficult for the Committee to thoroughly and accurately evaluate the performance of the Ministry over the reporting period.

The Committee recognises the essential oversight role of the Ministry of Defence in the security, defence and well-being of the nation and our people. Therefore, the Ministry should be seen to be the leading agency for the issuance of policy guidance, to shape the functions of all Government Departments under its umbrella.

Through the briefings of the Permanent Secretary for Defence and the Office of the Director-General of the National Security and Defence Review, the Committee was informed that the Ministry was undergoing extensive reform to ensure effectiveness of its roles under the current legal frameworks. In particular, the Committee was aware that the Ministry, under the proposed reform, will be guided by the National Security Strategy which is now before Government awaiting tabling in Parliament.

The challenges faced by globalisation and its transnational effects have posed additional threats to the nation and as such, the Ministry of Defence needs to strengthen its efforts in dealing with such challenges. Those are climate change and human security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, after reviewing the Report identified pertinent issues confronting the Ministry of Defence today. Some of the issues identified and witnessed during site visits on Tuesday, 19th March, 2019 to Wednesday, 20th March, 2019 were as follows:

1. The Committee is aware of concerns raised in respect of the gap created by the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS) performing immigration functions at the border versus the role of the Department of Immigration. The Committee recognises that the number of illegal immigrants may be due to the disconnection between FRCS and the Department of Immigration of which 2,000 overstayers in Fiji are manned by a 15-man Compliance Unit.
2. On the issue of Critical Asset Protection, the Committee is concerned that there is little or no security policy, Standard Operating Procedures and physical hardening of critical asset installations.
3. The Committee noted that little was done to ensure that the incident at Wailotua in Tailevu did not reoccur. The incident referred to here is where a container full of cyanide was placed at risk when the truck carrying this dangerous cargo was involved in an accident. The accident posed grave and immediate threat to personal lives and the environment.

4. The Committee noted that the Report makes little mention of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5 - Gender Equality.
5. The Independent Auditors Report highlighted the unreconciled variance of \$94,197 on the Border Control Management System, however, during the presentation by the Immigration Department, the matter was clarified adequately that there was no revenue loss.
6. The Security Division of the Ministry of Defence noted in 2016 that the traffic situation on our roads would worsen if nothing was done to address it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commends the good work of the organisation and achievements in its half fiscal year (2016) as captured in the Bi-Annual Report. While applauding the achievements of the Ministry, the Committee had identified some opportunities for improvements and these are outlined in the Report.

I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister, Permanent Secretary, including all staff and their families for a job well done and their dedication to securing the nation for all Fijians and visitors to our shores. I take this opportunity to also thank the Honourable Members of my Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report, with the support from the Secretariat.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to the Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary -General)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5):

I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting date.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources -
Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report 2013 - 2014

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report-2013 to 2014.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report 2013-2014, specifically on the Authority's operations and administration. The global demand for water has been increasing at a rate of about 1 percent per year over the past decade as a function of population growth, economic development and changing consumption patterns, among other factors, and it will continue to grow significantly over the foreseeable future.

The findings and recommendations put forward by the Committee are to assist the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) in its management, infrastructure, service delivery and increasing the water volume to cater for the increasing demands of this nation.

Despite the Annual Report 2013-2014, WAF has done remarkable work in providing our nation with clean and safe water. The Committee took note of this during the presentation by WAF and also during the site inspection. I wish to extend my appreciation to the Management and Staff of WAF for their dedication and service to all Fijians and visitors to our shores.

I take this opportunity to also thank my Committee Members for compiling this bipartisan Report. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I submit this report to the Fijian Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5):

I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts -
Review Report of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Second Semi-Annual Report

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to present the first report of the Public Accounts Committee under my leadership as Chairperson. This Report reviews the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Second Semi-Annual Report for the period 1st November, 2017 to 30th April, 2018. This Report is intended to summarise the work of the Committee on the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Second Semi-Annual Report.

The Committee scrutinised the information provided in the Report in terms of the key activities and expenditure incurred through the second six-month period of expenditure from the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund. The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's authority pursuant to Standing Order 110(1)(c) and as directed by the Speaker of the House, for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to examine and thereafter submit its findings to Parliament of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Second Semi-Annual Report.

The Annual Report content was thoroughly examined by the Committee. The COP 23 Secretariat was invited to explain to the Public Accounts Committee on the 12 questions that were raised during the deliberation of COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Second Semi-Annual Report. The response from the COP 23 Secretariat was exceptionally positive.

On Monday, 4th February, 2019, the COP 23 Presidency Secretariat Executive Director and Trustee, Mr. John Connor and the Finance Manager, Ms. Letila Tuiyalani, appeared before the Committee and clarified the functions and details of the Fund, particularly on the donations received, initiatives/outcomes and expenditure with the implementation aspects of it. The documentations were compiled and agreed to by the Committee following, the review of the Annual Report.

The financial statements reflected in this Second Semi-Annual Report is an audited statement of receipts and payments prepared by the PricewaterhouseCoopers Chartered Accountants which are presented in accordance with the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Act 2017, Procurement Regulations 2010, Section 58(4) of the Finance Instructions 2010 of the Republic of Fiji issued under the Financial Management Act 2004.

This is the second six-monthly account from 1st November, 2017 to 30th April, 2018 of the Fund since its commencement. The Committee commended the work of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Secretariat and recommends that Government takes the lead role and ownership of the initiatives and projects from the COP 23 Secretariat, and considers expanding its insurance risk cover for the low income households.

I wish to extend my appreciation to all Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report, namely:

- Honourable Joseph Nand - Deputy Chairperson;
- Honourable Vijendra Prakash;

- Honourable Aseri Radrodro; and
- Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

Further, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5), the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind Ram stood in as an Alternate Member for Honourable Joseph Nand in one of the Committee meetings.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat staff for their timely research, compilation and submission of this Report. I now commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5):

I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

We move on to the next Agenda Item.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj. You have the floor, Sir.

Code of Conduct Bill – Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, public officials and holders of office who are paid through public funds should be working in the best interest of all citizens. They should not, in any way, get involved in any corrupt practices.

In order to ensure that civil servants adhere to their responsibilities to serve the general public, Section 149 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji provides that a written law shall, and I quote:

- “(a) establish a code of conduct which shall be applicable to the President, Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Prime Minister, Ministers, Members of Parliament, holders of offices

established by or continued in existence under this Constitution or under any written law, members of commissions, permanent secretaries, ambassadors or other principal representatives of the State, and persons who hold statutory appointments or governing or executive positions in statutory authorities, and to such other offices (including public offices) as may be prescribed by written law;

- (b) establish rules, processes and procedures for the implementation of the code of conduct by the Accountability and Transparency Commission;
- (c) provide for the monitoring by the Accountability and Transparency Commission of compliance with the Code of Conduct by the officers mentioned in paragraph (a);
- (d) make provision for the investigation of alleged breaches of the code of conduct and enforcement of the code of conduct by the Accountability and Transparency Commission, including through criminal and disciplinary proceedings, and provide for the removal from office of those officers who are found to be in breach of the code of conduct;
- (e) provide for the protection of whistle-blowers, being persons who, in good faith, make disclosures that an officer mentioned in paragraph (a) has contravened any written law or has breached the code of conduct or has engaged in fraudulent or corrupt practices; and
- (f) provide for the annual declaration by the official mentioned in paragraph (a) of the assets and liabilities and financial interests of the officer, and of such other direct relatives of the officer as may be prescribed, to the Accountability and Transparency Commission, and for such declarations to be accessible to the public.”

Therefore, in order to enable these provisions of the Constitution, the Government of Fiji has introduced the Code of Conduct Bill 2018, which was then referred by Parliament to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. This step taken by the Fijian Government gives recognition to the efforts and contribution by this august House in the achievement of the State’s National Development Plan, whereby Government aims to strengthen institutions and be fully accountable to the people of Fiji through Parliament and through the laws being enacted and passed in this august House.

The Committee in its review process, conducted extensive public consultations and relied on research support from the Secretariat team. The Committee also consulted the initiating Ministry and the drafters of the Bill so as not to overlook any pertinent policy and legal ramifications on the Bill. An amendment was made to Schedule 6 of the Bill which has been marked in red in the copies of the Bill provided with this Report.

This Report will cover the Standing Committees’ role and the process it followed in reviewing the Code of Conduct Bill 2018. It was also ensured that all due process regarding the review of the Bill has been followed and that the provisions contained in the Bill would contribute to the achievement of the Bill’s objectives.

Some of the pertinent areas which the Bill addresses are as follows:

- the establishment of a uniform code of conduct that applies to all public officials;
- setting out the legal framework for the establishment of codes of conduct that are applicable to the President, Speaker of Parliament, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Prime

Minister, Ministers, Members of Parliament, holders of offices established by or continued in existence under the Constitution or under any written law, members of Commissions, statutory boards and executives of statutory authorities; and

- the establishment of the rules and processes for the implementation by the Accountability and Transparency Commission (ATC).

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the last term of Parliament for their effort and input, which our Committee also relied on when reviewing the Bill and formulating this Report. The previous Committee had reviewed a similar piece of legislation which the provisions of the current Bill mirrors, thus my Committee utilised the salient information noted from the previous Committee to assist it in the direction for its review.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Members of the current Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee for their deliberations and input, the Alternate Members who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend, the Secretariat, the entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions and the members of the public for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

I, as the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, commend my first Report on a Bill, which in this case is the Code of Conduct Bill 2018 (Bill No. 33 of 2018) to the Parliament and seek the support of all members of this august House for the Bill since it is designed for the greater good of all Fijians. Thank you.

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

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 121(1):

I hereby table the Committee's Report on the Code of Conduct Bill 2018 (Bill No. 33 of 2018), and pursuant to Standing Order 86, I move that it be set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on but before we do, we are going to take a break for refreshments. I will suspend proceedings for refreshments at the Big Committee Room and when we resume in half an hour, we will consider agenda item 6 in the Order Paper.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.30 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.01 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please be seated.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Minister for Health and Medical Services;
2. Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation;
3. Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment; and
4. Minister for Forestry.

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

Honourable Members, I now call on the Minister for Health and Medical Services to deliver his statement. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HIV/AIDS in Fiji

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Good morning, Honourable Members, and also to the students who are here today. I welcome you to this august House.

Honourable Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to brief us on HIV/AIDS and the reasons why it is growing to be an epidemic proportion globally and inside our Region. I had alluded to earlier in my answer to a question yesterday, Honourable Speaker, how there are two disease burdens that have been on a global level and made it into the agenda of the UN General Assembly. One of them is Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and the other one is Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Now, AIDS is a chronic, potentially life-threatening condition caused by the HIV virus. In a nutshell, we could have, Honourable Speaker, people who may have the virus, but not necessarily yet have AIDS. It is when the breakdown of the immune system within them and the susceptibility to secondary infection, that is when AIDS sets in.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) Global Report of 2017, the global statistics in view of HIV is at 36.9 million people living with HIV and at this juncture, Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank and congratulate you for being Fiji's Ambassador for HIV/AIDS and also the UNAIDS Regional Goodwill Ambassador for the Pacific Region. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Of this figure, 58 percent are currently in access of the antiretroviral treatment which is to suppress the virus so that the patients then do not have full-blown AIDS. A further 15.8 million started their treatment in 2018 in accordance with the World Health Organization's "Treatment for All Campaign", which resulted in a staggering 36.7 million people, who must be successfully maintained

on lifelong treatment. Achieving high HIV testing access and treatment coverage, coupled with high levels of viral load suppression, should lead to eliminating HIV as a public health threat; not eliminating it completely as a disease but as a public health threat by 2030 and that is the desire.

In describing the global prevalence rate for HIV/AIDS, we can now understand why this cannot be taken lightly because as a rule of thumb in the health sector, when it comes to HIV/AIDS, we are always wondering if there are another two or three cases for every one case that is diagnosed, that may be undiagnosed.

In light of that, it is only prudent that we continue to track the incidence rate which dropped by 47 percent in the peak in 1996 globally, to only 1.8 million people who became infected with HIV in 2017 alone. A total of 940,000 individuals around the world died from AIDS-related deaths in 2017.

In 2014, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and partners launched the 90-90-90 targets with the aim of diagnosing 90 percent of all HIV-positive persons, providing Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) for 90 percent of those diagnosed, and achieving viral suppression for 90 percent of those treated by 2020.

Global standings in terms of the 90-90-90 Global Target was that:

- 75 percent of people living with HIV know their status;
- 79 percent of those who know their status and were accessing treatment; and
- 81 percent of those on treatment were virally suppressed.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to bring it closer to our Region which is the Asia-Pacific Region. Fiji is classified under this Region and the distribution of HIV/AIDS in several regions is alarming with 5.2 million people living with HIV in 2017. Of that figure, 2.7 million people were accessing antiretroviral treatment in 2017, with an alarming 170,000 individuals in our Asia-Pacific Region died from AIDS-related deaths, and there were 280,000 new cases of HIV infections in 2017 alone. The Asia-Pacific Region's stand in terms of the 90-90-90 Global Target is 53 percent of those who know their status and were accessing antiretroviral treatment.

In 2018, there were 72 new cases of AIDS registered in Fiji, which gives us an incidence rate of 8.6 per 100,000 population. And it is indicating to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services that while the trend is slightly higher from one percent to 1.1 percent in terms of the prevalence, this may be because of the increasing awareness, people are now coming forward to be tested and the other important thing to realise is for every person who may be tested, a considerable number of our Fijians are negative, so testing is important. It is available in Antenatal clinics for all our mothers to be tested and also integrated into the Tuberculosis and HIV Management that has all made it possible for early detection, diagnosis and management of HIV in Fiji, and also those who have conjoint infections with tuberculosis.

The total number of diagnosed cases inclusive of both, old and new, from 1989 to 2018 stands at 930 cases. And as I have alluded to earlier, HIV prevalence rate is 1.11 per 1,000 population, which means that out of every 10,000 people, 10 are living with HIV. The total number of registered AIDS-related deaths that we know of to-date is 117. The total number of people living with HIV who are on treatment is 468.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 359 of this 468 or 77 percent are those on treatment and 444 out of 468 are adults on treatment. The total number of infants on follow-up and on treatment for HIV is 13. The number of children is seven and in the last five years, an average of seven pregnant women per

annum is being diagnosed with HIV in pregnancy. There is no significant difference, Honourable Speaker, between the rate of HIV infection between males and females.

There is a higher prevalence of HIV among our young from 20 years to 29 years, and from 20 years to 25 years is predominantly female, whereas in male, it is more towards 25 years to 35 years. Fiji's standing in terms of the 90-90-90 Global Target is 57.6 percent, which is above the Asian-Pacific Region's standing of 53 percent of those accessing antiretroviral treatment.

Honourable Speaker Sir, HIV cases are seen and referred from every medical subdivision around the country and is not limited to a particular occupational group, culture, ethnicity, gender, social class, faith, and can be classified as a generalised epidemic. Government, through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, continues to step up its effort to ensure working in relevance to the 2030 Global Agenda Target.

To make that happen, Honourable Speaker, we have now put in place strategies to ensure that a continuum of care is maintained from diagnosis to the administration of ART and viral suppression, and I would like to share them with the Honourable Members this morning.

In terms of Clinical Approach:

1. HIV clinical services continues to be provided by specialists and nurses who have continued to undergo capacity building programmes to enhance their knowledge and expertise in the management of HIV. Officers attended trainings in Bangkok, Thailand, Papua New Guinea and locally, to name a few. These officers are, Dr. Dashika from Suva HUB and Dr. Lavenia from the Lautoka HUB, who are recognised trainers within the Pacific Region.
2. There is very good collaboration between the Clinicians (Obstetricians, Pediatricians, Physicians and TB Specialists) and the HUB doctors for HIV in terms of the management of HIV cases.
3. There is a gradual buildup of the Sub-Divisional Hospitals to be able to provide ART to its clients, and this has already started at the Navua Hospital.
4. Laboratory services support are in place and continues to be provided, and we are currently working with the Divisional Laboratories to increase their capacity for viral load testing and early infant diagnosis, and we are gradually expanding to other Divisional Hospitals.
5. HIV/TB is well established in terms of clinical management of co-infections.
6. Even though antiretroviral and laboratory consumables have been an issue in the past, this has been rectified by better processes through our logistics component of the Ministry which is the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services, and also progressing procurement through UNICEF, to ensure consistency in supplies.
7. HIV screening is made available and is free of charge in every Medical Subdivision to every Fijian and is also provided routinely at our Tuberculosis Hospital.
8. Laboratory infrastructure is imperative in the provision of HIV services, and we continue to look at increasing our capacity in terms of laboratory infrastructure to

also include viral load testing routinely done in the main hospitals, so that we are able to track our progress towards the Global 90-90-90 Target.

Honourable Speaker, from the clinical approach to the preventative approach, there are a few strategies that I would like to share with the august House:

1. Prevention of Parent-to-Child Transmission services and HIV screening services continue to be provided routinely at antenatal clinics around the country, and clinical management is instituted as soon as a mother is diagnosed as positive.
2. Screening for Parent-to-Child Transmission is also provided at all healthcare outlets providing maternity services and the aim is to screen, diagnose and treat pregnant mothers who may be positive early to prevent the transmission of HIV to their babies and service is also provided for partners.
3. HIV counselling services are made available in all Medical Subdivisions and Divisional Hospitals and we also partnered with our NGOs, like Empower Pacific, in providing these services in antenatal clinic and other clinics as well.
4. Antiretroviral treatment is available and is also free of charge for those on treatment, and every individual put on treatment is encouraged to continue the treatment for life. We have noted an increase in the uptake of antiretroviral treatment and we are happy to say that survival for HIV has remarkably improved with the advent of HIV treatment.
5. HIV clinical management and continuum of care is dynamic whereby the Ministry continuously provide training both, locally and internationally, for doctors, nurses and staff who provide HIV services, to ensure that we adhere to best practices and WHO acceptable standards.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry allocates a budget of just over \$350,000 for the prevention of HIV/AIDS annually. With this amount, Government is grateful to UNAIDS and other organisations for supporting the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in our untiring effort to progress the HIV Agenda independently of Ministry of Health funding, especially on awareness, advocacy and health promotion.

Honourable Speaker, our supply chain management system also ensures the continuous supply of all required antiretroviral drugs, as well as other laboratory consumables required to be able to deliver services routinely and effectively.

There are also continuous prevention efforts through our Adolescent Health Programme, the Peer Educator Initiative through our School Health Programme for primary and secondary schools where sexual and reproductive health awareness and advocacy is carried out.

Honourable Speaker, life skills training is also carried out for our school youths, safe festival campaigns and major sporting events, like the Annual Fiji Secondary Schools Athletics Competition, is an opportunity for us whereby we raise awareness on the prevention of HIV.

Honourable Speaker, a National Strategic Plan on HIV and STIs 2016 to 2020 is currently in place and whilst it is in place, we are also reviewing what has already been started and looking at strategies for the next five years. The Plan was put together with wide consultation with relevant stakeholders and activities therein are not only confined to the Ministry but also include activities to be implemented through the support of NGOs and other stakeholders.

Honourable Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support of our technical partners - the WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNDP, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organisations, as well as the FijiFirst Government for its continuous support to the Ministry.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry cannot do this work alone and with HIV/AIDS in epidemic proportion, it can only be right if intervention takes a whole of Government and a whole of society approach for us to address this definitively in Fiji.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to respond to the Ministerial Statement on HIV/AIDS in Fiji, discussing it in a global context and efforts by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to curb the disease, but firstly, paying my earnest tribute to you, Sir, for your sterling efforts in your capacity as our Regional Ambassador in the fight against HIV/AIDS given the vulnerability of Pacific States and the disease.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that the statistics by the WHO, our regional and our very own on HIV/AIDS analyse this further to enable us to ascertain the impending risks by this fatal disease. We need to analyse and compare with our very own to determine what are the challenges and what kind of resources and strategies that we need to deploy to curb HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the data available on HIV/AIDS cases in Fiji need further analysis, to enable the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and all the stakeholders to ascertain on how to grapple with the situation here. The socio-economic impacts of these cases upon their families, communities and the national economy are many. They need to be taken into account to mitigate and curb this pressing issue.

The latest report that the Honourable Minister has mentioned on HIV positive cases is on the rise. Using it as an indicator is worrying for a young and developing nation like Fiji, whose health and medical services need to take it very seriously.

Sir, in the Statement made by the Honourable Minister, highlighting the sanitising between WHO and Ministry of Health Fiji, in its combat against HIV AIDS, is praiseworthy and most welcomed. It leads us, the Opposition and also the Government side, to be sincerely and genuinely committed to fighting HIV/AIDS and creating awareness on the same as a measure of prevention. Sir, as the Honourable Minister had mentioned that in one of the reports in 2018, it recorded 919 HIV cases. That was not alarming enough, Sir.

In 2019, there were 220 HIV positive cases that were reported. Two years back, there was a total of 545 HIV cases in Fiji which means, in two years alone, there were 374 new cases registered, the emphasis is on the registered because as the Honourable Minister for Health had said, these are the patients who might be coming out and being registered as HIV patients. But no one knows how many still continue to live with HIV/AIDS without registration. If that is the yard to ascertain the risk to the lives of the Fijian people and our national economy is doomed. That being so, what is the plan to contain this disaster in the making?

We express our full agreement with the Honourable Minister to join efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and the importance of lives and good bout of health to themselves, their families and their national economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, treatment for HIV is available and free, as said by the Honourable Minister for Health, and it has been since 2014. I must commend medical personnel at the various Health Centres for at times, vigorously following up patients for continuous treatment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the capacity to contain and curb HIV/AIDS and create the much-needed awareness as a measure of prevention depends on a number of key issues ranging from partnerships to strategies, funding to supplies, ownership to compassion.

A lot depends on the leadership in this fight, and the ability and the will to outreach and establish a network of pooling our already scarce resources to achieve the targets spelt out by the Honourable Minister of Health and Medical Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for Health for his Ministerial Statement which has, no doubt, given rise to hope and a challenge for the Government of the day to realise the mission and vision shared by the Honourable Minister and act on it. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I have to admit that when I saw the media statement last week highlighting that Tailevu area alone had 220 reported cases of HIV/AIDS, I was both alarmed and saddened, because I come from that geographical area, but I believe that probably not all of them are from Tailevu for that matter.

Honourable Speaker, that sadness stems from the knowledge that alarm stereotype and stigma while reduced distaste still exists and, Honourable Speaker, I take this time also to compliment you for the great work that you have done for the propagation of the work against this terrible disease. Therefore, there will be, in my opinion, quite a large number of unreported cases as well that I hope the Ministry is working hard to ascertain because these are our people, Honourable Speaker. They need hope, support and compassion.

In fact, I also recall that in 2016, the then Permanent Secretary for Health, Mr. Philip Davis, also raised the alarm with respect to the rising numbers and his assessment then was that the trend they saw was that, there was going to be an increase among the 20 years to 29 year olds and 30 years to 39 year olds. In that year, the Permanent Secretary said that Fiji had a cumulative total of 545 cases. He also said that civil society played a critical role in HIV/AIDS advocacy.

Come the year 2018, media reports highlighted that Fiji has reported a total of 919 HIV/AIDS cases, and I am struggling, Honourable Speaker, to believe that from 2016 to 2019, the number of HIV/AIDS cases only increased by 446.

All these points back to the Honourable Minister and the Health portfolio that he is accountable for, Honourable Speaker, not only are the alarming statistics of NCD-related illness and deaths cause for concern, but the issue of HIV/AIDS too as well as it seems from the Honourable Minister's Statement today.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister's budget which he inherited has about \$382 million to cater for water, sanitation and hygiene programmes, the health and nutrition programme under HIV/AIDS Programme, Honourable Speaker.

The Ministry itself allocated about \$350,000 which HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme under Public Health Services. Now, may I ask, is that money inclusive of the valuable work of NGOs or is there an expectation that NGOs will have to source their own funds from donors to assist the Ministry?

The issue of HIV/AIDS is serious, Honourable Speaker, it has been serious ever since HIV/AIDS arrived on our shores and incidentally, it is my sincere hope that employees of the State who are relocated abroad in whatever profession for long periods of time, be counselled both pre-post and post-deployment, Honourable Speaker.

I thank the Honourable Minister for his update but if there is genuine concern, then the budget document that we will see next June will tell both us and the taxpayers watching in the extent of that concern. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua for his Statement.

We now move on to the second Ministerial Statement for the day and I have the pleasure of calling on the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, to deliver her Statement. You have the floor, Honourable Member.

Primary Programmes and Policies for Fijians Living with Disabilities

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise to deliver my Statement on an area of work that truly puts into play the Fijian Government's pledge to leave no one behind. It is our humble privilege at the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to administer the Primary Programmes and Policies for Fijians living with disabilities, and at the same time we are thankful to the line Ministries for having programmes specifically aimed at benefiting this segment of our population.

As per the most recent census data, Honourable Speaker, 13.7 percent of our population is living with, at least, one function in challenge. This may look like a small percentage, but it equates to 113,595 Fijians over the age of three years, to be precise. We have a responsibility and obligation to ensure that the best interests of these Fijians with disabilities, is protected in every aspect of life.

Mr. Speaker, they say that the human spirit is one of ability, perseverance and courage that no disability can steal. And on this note, I wish to commend the participants of the recent Special Olympics World Summer Games held in Abu Dhabi last month, and convey a special congratulations to all the Fijian athletes who made us proud at that world stage returning home with 17 medals, claiming 7 Gold, 4 Silver and 6 Bronze.

(Applause)

These are real life heroes who let nothing come between them and their dreams, and their win should open the eyes of those who think that persons living with disabilities are a burden or cannot achieve anything in life.

It is with this acceptance and recognition of abilities that the Fijian Government has been moving forward in terms of policies, laws, and programmes. We aim to ensure that the development of Fiji does not miss out on the resourcefulness and potential socio-economic participation of any Fijian.

We are also adamant that the care and welfare of any Fijian living with disabilities be given equal importance as any other citizen of our country.

Honourable Speaker, having said that, our greatest commitment to our fellow Fijians living with disabilities was shown through our 2013 Constitution.

Section 42 of the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the first standalone rights-based law that we have ever had in Fiji for persons living with disabilities. Section 42 gives Fijians with disabilities a number of rights, including:

- reasonable access to all places;
- materials and devices pertaining to their disabilities; and
- use of sign language, braille or other appropriate means of communication.

This provision goes further to give persons with disabilities the right to reasonable adaption of:

- buildings;
- infrastructure;
- vehicles;
- working arrangements;
- rules;
- practices or procedures to enable their full participation in society; and
- the effective realisation of their rights.

A very progressive provision which embeds Government's commitment to uphold the rights of Fijians living with disabilities and to leave no one behind.

Following on from our Constitution, the Fijian Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017. Following that ratification of the Convention, this Parliament enacted a domestic law in the form of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, which further clarifies and mandates legal obligations pertaining to the rights of persons living with disabilities in Fiji.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 has now expanded on Section 42 of the Constitution to reflect our international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons living with Disabilities. Prior to this, Mr. Speaker, the closest law we had in Fiji was the Fiji National Council of Disabled Persons Act of 1994, which essentially puts in place a Council to look into issues pertaining to persons living with disabilities without clarifying what their rights were. This lacuna has now been addressed through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018.

The FNCDP which has been continued in existence by the 2018 Act is an advisory arm and indeed, a facilitative arm for upholding the rights of persons with disabilities. In its most recent meeting earlier this year, the Council has endorsed an implementation framework of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act while there is a review of the National Policy. This is the current priority of the Council which will continue to meet and ensure its mandated duties are adequately fulfilled, while helping Government further enhance our programmes for people living with disabilities.

With these legal platforms in place, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one can strongly assert that Fijians living with disabilities and the issues they face in their daily lives have never been so visible and never have we had a Government that inculcates this visibility in policies and programmes like we do now.

Honourable Speaker, for persons living with disabilities, a key component of their welfare is caregiving. To enhance the capacities of loved ones to take care of persons living with disabilities within their families and within their communities, the Ministry partnered with Australia Pacific Training Coalition (ATPC), to carry out caregiving skills trainings in communities. So far, 285 Fijians have been trained. This community training will continue as part of the community empowerment programme for the welfare and care of the elderly and those living with disabilities.

Our staff had also undergone assistive devices training Modules I to III in a partnership with Motivation Australia, Fiji National University, and the Spinal Injuries Association whereby the staff are now able to carry out basic assistive devices repair work and custom fitting of such devices to the needs of the beneficiaries in the districts.

Honourable Speaker, as a nation, our ability to effectively tackle issues surrounding women, children, the elderly and persons living with disabilities, depends a great deal in the strength of our partnership with non-State actors who do work in the respective areas.

To that end, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 35 Non-Government Organisations which are registered with us, and who have continuously done work in the area of empowering people living with disabilities.

HON. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka.*

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- We work closely with some key organisations in implementing our vision for the clientele that we serve. One of the most dependable organisations as such is the Spinal Injuries Association whereby their mobility device service continues to be the largest service delivery in mobility aid and appliances in Fiji.

In 2018, the Association received a total of five consignments for mobility aid and my Ministry works with them on a day to day basis in terms of distribution. Aside from this, the Association also provides our clients with maintenance and follow-up services.

The reach and the need for these services continue to be on the rise, considering the impact of NCDs in Fiji. Our partnership aims to provide better access of this vital service to members and their families, especially in rural areas. The value of these services enables ordinary Fijians to access mobility aid and appliances, together with medical consumables that are not readily available.

Apart from the Spinal Injuries Association, we also work closely with:

- Counterstroke Fiji, to provide community awareness and support for stroke patients and their families.
- Viti Spinal Injuries Association, to ensure we can improve the quality of life for people affected by spinal injuries and physical challenges by addressing accessibility issues at community level.

- United Blind Persons Association and Fiji Association for the Deaf for trainings, awareness and to build the capacities for the economic empowerment for sight and hearing impaired persons respectively.
- Fiji Disabled People's Federation, to engage technical expertise for many of our trainings and awareness programmes.
- Gospel School for the Deaf and Fiji Society for the Blind, whereby we provide funding towards the hostels affiliated with their respective schools that accommodates students from all over Fiji.
- Frank Hilton Early Intervention Centre which is the only service provider of its kind in detecting and providing support in terms of early development challenges.

Honourable Speaker, I now wish to highlight a number of initiatives funded by Government which have made persons living with disabilities more visible, and have empowered them in a way they have never been empowered before, the:

- Disability Monthly Allowance Programme for which the Ministry has been allocated a sum of \$6.8 million.
- Bundle Insurance Cover for injury, fire, life and funeral.
- \$100,000 for economic empowerment of persons living with disabilities.
- \$1.1 million for grants to organisations which provide services to persons living with disabilities.
- \$1 million to the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons to carry out its role under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.
- Bus Fare Subsidy Programme benefitting 77,000 living with disabilities.
- A 300 percent tax incentive for employers who employ persons living with disabilities.
- \$0.5 million for making Fijian buildings disability friendly.
- \$580,000 for a Western Disability Centre, the plan for which was approved in March and currently is with the Construction Implementation Unit to see the project through.
- 20 fulltime scholarships, similar to the Toppers package for students with disabilities.
- Prioritising areas, like Speech Therapy, Educational and Clinical Psychology and Occupational Therapy in the award of Toppers Scholarships.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we are far from the finish line in achieving our obligations in this area, but I must say we have made a bullet start by putting in place the strongest legal platform ever, through the 2013 Constitution and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, which mandates Government and the Non-Government sector to take action to ensure that the rights of persons living with disabilities are recognised.

To conclude, there are still opportunities for improvement and our Ministry will be working with partners to assess the feasibility, areas of intervention in new areas like early intervention, family support and capacity building of carers. I must add, that while Government is doing what it can to ensure persons living with disabilities have a fair chance at life, it is up to us as family units, as communities, and as individuals to change the way we treat people with disabilities. We need to identify, nurture and encourage the inherent potential and capabilities that each person has.

Before I close, Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to put on record the sincere gratitude of Government through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and my own personal gratitude to Dr. Josefa Koroivueta, who was the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for the past seven years. He carried out his role as Permanent Secretary with commitment, sacrifice and with a passion which brought to the fore his belief in the potential of women, children, the elderly and those living with disabilities. He portrayed the characteristics of a great servant leader during his tenure with the Ministry, and I would like to wish him the very best in his future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Minister for her Statement and I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodro. You have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I thank the Honourable Minister for that enlightenment on our loved ones, those living with disabilities. I also acknowledge the programmes, the initiatives, the good work that is being undertaken by the Ministry, aimed at supporting and promoting the lives of people living with disabilities so that they are offered equal access to services and opportunities.

Honourable Speaker, I also acknowledge the Act that had been mentioned by the Honourable Minister on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018. But, Honourable Speaker, we know the successful enforcement of this Act is crucial to the full realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities. And under the Act, as we have heard, mandates the establishment of the Fiji National Council for people living with disabilities or the FNCDP and the objectives of the Council, and may I read from the Act, states and I quote:

“The objectives of the Council are as follows:

- (a) to act as a coordinating body for all organisations dealing with the care and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities;
- (b) to raise awareness throughout society, including awareness at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities;
- (c) to work towards eliminating the causes of disabilities or impairment;
- (d) to promote the recognition of skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities, and their contributions to the workplace and labour market;
- (d) to foster at all levels of society and the education system, including in all children from an early age an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities; and

(f) to uphold, promote and enforce the rights of persons with disabilities.”

Honourable Speaker, those are the mandated objectives of the Council. To be able to carry out or to achieve those objectives, Honourable Speaker, the Council needs resources. They need financial resources, they need people and they need other relevant appropriate resources, like facilities and infrastructures.

Honourable Speaker, we have heard the Honourable Minister highlighting the programmes with the financial grants or assistance given to the FNCDP. But, in one of the presentations that was undertaken by FNCDP to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs highlighted the challenges they faced in having to try to carry out their roles as mandated under the Act.

One of the challenges highlighted was financial constraints. I know that the Act is new and also the FNCDP Act has been reviewed, but I would implore the Government to further reassess the grant that has been given to FNCDP and try and increase it, so that they are in a position as a mandated authority under the Act to be able to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

The other challenge that they had highlighted was the lack of database in having to capture all of our loved ones living around Fiji in that database, highlighting their disabilities so that they are better addressed by the Ministry and also by FNCDP.

One of the other challenges that they highlighted was the need for more consultation, and I am glad I heard that from the Honourable Minister.

In concluding, Honourable Speaker, consultation in this instance, is the key pillar to democracy and good governance in having to address the needs of our people living with disability. And I take the opportunity to once more, echo the voices of our loved ones living with disabilities in what they say that, “nothing about us without us” and I implore again the Honourable Minister for more consultation with the people living with disabilities in having to have a say in ways and means in having to address their issues. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, I give the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Ma'am.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for her statement, and I also echo Fiji's sentiments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Team Fiji's Performance at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Abu Dhabi last month. What an outstanding performance and we are very, very proud of them.

I am hopeful by now, Honourable Speaker, that those who make the decisions, I will consider them in the awards for Fiji's Sports People of the Year Awards and not as a special category, but mainstreamed alongside our able-bodied athletes.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to, at this time, pause to pay tribute to the late Frank Hilton who, as we all know, was the father of Special Education in Fiji.

Essentially, I believe that the commitments being made by the Ministry in supporting and mainstreaming persons with disabilities in Fiji, most particularly after ratifying the UN Treaty and the Disability Act passed by this House during the last session, are being effected. However, I am sure that the Honourable Minister agrees that there is still much that remains to be done.

For example, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to highlight this to the Honourable Minister, even though it is beyond her Ministry and not within her portfolio while the victim is, a victim of amputation, won his High Court case against the State and was awarded over \$64,000 in compensation. The State refused to pay him and even when he won his appeal, the State having first said they were getting the cheque ready, then advised him that they were now going to file an appeal in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Speaker, this case has dragged on for four years and now with the end nearly in sight, the State has decided to take it to the highest court of the Judiciary. So, I am just asking about the people's rights, Honourable Speaker. He is now a person with disability, but is being denied compensation while accident victims now under the new compensation framework are receiving their compensations rather swiftly. We can understand that this person is very, very hurt, Mr. Speaker.

With that in mind, we greatly look forward to seeing in greater detail the attention that the Honourable Minister and her Ministry will afford to persons living with disabilities towards more mainstreaming, especially with our young ones in the upcoming Budget. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for her statement.

I now give the floor to the third Ministerial Statement for today which will be given by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment. You have the floor, Sir.

Strategies for Expanding our Non-Sugar Crop Sector

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and colleagues; I wish to speak on the topic "Expanding our Non-Sugar Crop Agriculture Sector.

Honourable Speaker, you would have noted that in the last Sitting of Parliament, I presented an overall strategy for the agriculture sector. Today, I wish to talk about our strategies for the crops that are classified in the non-sugar crop sector.

In the next two or three Sittings of Parliament, I will be presenting a Ministerial Statement on the Livestock Sector, Organic Farming and also on Plant Protection. These are the four main areas of the agriculture sector.

Honourable Speaker, as Minister responsible for Agriculture, I wish to inform this House on some of the current and recent developments that have taken place with regards to moving agriculture forward as outlined in the framework that I presented in the last sitting.

Over the last four weeks, Honourable Speaker, we had appointed within the Ministry, commodity leaders as well as project leaders. Having said that, these people would be in charge of a particular commodity, for example, taro or *dalo* or dairy production, and they will have teams under them. They have been tasked to expand that sector based on the framework that I presented in Parliament in the last Sitting.

Honourable Speaker, we had presentations last week at the Legalega Research Station, and I thought that it is important to inform this august House on this strategy.

Honourable Speaker, in the last Sitting, I had alluded that we wanted the agriculture sector to grow and develop based on signals in the market. All along we have been providing grants and

subsidies to get the production and supply side to grow. But what we want, Honourable Speaker, is while we give them leverage, we want market signals to drive production and supply, and that will be sustainable for the long run.

Honourable Speaker, the non-agricultural sector is ever growing and needs to be further supported through development strategies to increase the performance in terms of crop and livestock, to meet the needs of the Fijian population, as well as reduce our dependency on imported products.

Honourable Speaker, both the crop and livestock have enormous production potential in Fiji. In fact, last week when we had the meeting in Nadi, followed by the Pacific Islands Agriculture Ministers Meeting jointly hosted by the People's Republic of China where the Honourable Minister for Agriculture from China was there, we had looked at how we would leverage the agriculture sector, and how we would see some of Fiji's agricultural products entering the Chinese market. Sir, given the size of China's market, if we can get a small percentage of that market, we will do enormously well in terms of boosting our foreign reserves position.

Honourable Speaker, unfortunately, over the last five-year period, the growth rate of the agriculture sector was negative, attributing to the frequent natural disasters that we had, starting from *TC Winston*, droughts and floods, which has affected our agriculture sector seriously.

My Honourable colleagues on the other side, Honourable Speaker, still do not understand how natural disasters....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, thanks to Honourable Niko Nawaikula during his time at iTLTB really did major irreversible damage to Fiji's agriculture sector.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- If there is one person ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, I ask him to withdraw that, do not get personal, please, if you want to debate. He is boring, everyone who comes here, they want to go out.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.-Honourable Member, you have the floor, but do not forget the Chair.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I just wish that Honourable Members on the other side understand how natural disasters have contributed towards stalling and stagnating the growth and development of all sectors in this country.

Honourable Speaker, when you have a natural disaster, it has several impacts on the economy. It:

1. destroys our infrastructure;
2. destroys the agriculture produce that we have; and

3. takes away the existing budgetary allocation that would have contributed to growth and development of GDP towards restoring the economy.

These had a major effect on our agriculture sector after *TC Winston*, and then we had several flood as well as drought.

Honourable Speaker, climate change continues to have an impact on Fiji's agriculture sector but despite that, we are forging ahead with strategies to expand the agriculture sector.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, let me now highlight some of the strategies that we wish to pursue in terms of its expanding the crop sector.

Honourable Speaker, I now wish to speak on the rice industry which is critical in terms of ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... not only import substitution but also in terms of contributing to Fiji's Food Security.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry will focus on the rice breeding programme and also the promotion of programme to involve research and seed production of quality rice seeds.

Honourable Speaker, currently, the Republic of China is assisting Fiji with nine experts to work on rice development which is part of Phase II in the Central and Northern Divisions, which we wish to expand in the Western Division later this year. The present average yields of rice produced by farmers range from 2.4 tonnes to 2.8 tonnes per hectare.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, if he does not want to listen, the door is there.

(Laughter)

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, the current productivity ranges from 2.4 tonnes to 2.8 tonnes per hectare in rain-fed and irrigated rice ecosystems.

The total rice production in 2017 was 9,113 tonnes which has increased by 32 percent since 2013. Currently, 70 percent of the farmers....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And for that because of Grace Road, that is how you arrived at that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Listen!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, 70 percent of the farmers have an average farm size less than one hectare. There are about 20 percent of farmers with rice land between two hectare to four hectares and another 10 percent, above four hectares.

Honourable Speaker, there is an 11percent increase in the number of rice farmers by Divisions from 2015 to 2018. This shows that farmers are showing interest in our Rice Revitalization Programme.

Honourable Speaker, since 2013, we had a production of 6,873 metric tonnes. Now, we have gone up to 9,113 metric tonnes and we are importing 38,850 metric tonnes. There is a huge potential to expand rice production and fulfil this

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... loss of foreign exchange that we are seeing.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry is working on the following strategy to revitalise rice industry; the introduction of high yielding improved rice varieties in Fiji which is saline, tolerant, high yielding and drought-tolerant.

Honourable Speaker, one of the reasons why we have got so low number of rice farmers is because people like Honourable Niko Naiwaikula refused to renew their leases.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- And he is sitting in this House and he has the audacity ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... to continue to interact when I am presenting so that he can learn something from me.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, now you get it. He destroys the artefact of the land tenure system in this country.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A Point of Order. Honourable Speaker, that is too much.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, he wanted to send me outside. He accused me of these, he accused me of that. So, let us not get personal, talk to the issue. My point of order is that, do not get personal, please.

(Laughter)

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I think I will need to take the Honourable Member for a tour of our rice breeding stations.

Later this year, we will be releasing a high yielding aerobic rice variety which will yield about four times more than the current yield that we have on the farm.

Honourable Speaker, we are also now looking at how we could expand seed production so that when we want to expand rice production in the Western Division, we will be providing seeds to farmers, particularly this new high yielding variety.

Honourable Speaker, rice farming can be laborious and in this regard, we are working with donor development partners so that we can bring in machinery and provide it to farmers on a co-operative basis so that we support them, given the issue of labour shortage in the rice industry - machinery with regard to rice cultivation, rice harvesting and rice milling. So this is on our agenda in terms of ensuring that to deal with labour shortage in the rice area, we will be going big time into mechanising the rice sector.

Honourable Speaker, with regard to *dalo* production, unfortunately, over the last five years, our *dalo* production has halved. In 2013, we produced 87,000 tonnes of *dalo* and in 2017, it stood at 42,000 tonnes of *dalo*. There are several reasons for it.

Honourable Speaker, 70 percent of the *dalo* exports come from Taveuni. Farm survey in Taveuni has indicated that the average *dalo* yield is 7 tonnes per hectare as compared to research yields which should be around 15 tonnes. So we have got half the productivity, and this is one of the major contributing factors towards reduction in *dalo* productivity.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Listen, I will tell you why. All you need to have is patience, P-A-T-I-E-N-C-E.

Honourable Speaker, inconsiderate cultivation practices resulted in the continuous depletion of soil fertility and this is highly prevalent in Taveuni where the exports from Taveuni has dropped by 40 percent. To address this inconsistency of *dalo* production in Fiji, the Ministry will continue to strengthen its programme on improving soil fertility, particularly in Taveuni and also throughout Fiji. In Taveuni we have found, from soil tests, major deficiencies in nutrients like phosphorous, potassium and nitrogen.

Honourable Speaker, the first step that we are taking in regards to this is to ask the farmers to fallow the land between crops and plant it with "mucuna". "Mucuna" is a creeper plant which plays a very important role in nitrogen-fixing, as well as improving the top soil characteristics.

Honourable Speaker, this particular species was introduced by the Ministry of Forests and will also assist the farmers in using poultry manure and other organic fertiliser that we are in the process of

developing, so that we can boost and get back the nutrient level of the soil amongst these *dalo* farmers in Taveuni.

Honourable Speaker, what had happened was, with the rise in *kava* prices, there are some land that was under *dalo* has shifted towards *kava* obviously because of price signals coming out of *kava* plantations.

Honourable Speaker, we are also promoting irrigation technology in the *dalo* sector. We have successfully experimented a farm in Taveuni where we supported the establishment of sprinkler irrigation and it has resulted in an increase in the yield by about 50 percent.

Honourable Speaker, the other causal factor for reduction in *dalo* output has been the taro leaf blight disease which in 1993 and 1994, wiped out about 95 percent of *dalo* in the Samoa *dalo* industry. We also have that here and we want to ensure that we bring it under control.

So, Honourable Speaker, our Ministry of Agriculture Crop Research Team has released two *dalo* tolerant varieties (*Tarova Loa* and *Tarova Vula*), that is resistant to Taro Leaf Blight and that will address the issue of susceptibility to this particular disease.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have big plans to expand the *kava* industry. As you know, at the moment, it is one of the high return crop in Fiji and we had a major influx of income in the rural and interior out of *kava* exports.

In 2013, the total production of *kava* was 3,700 metric tonnes and now as a response to price signals *kava* production has gone up to 9,113 tonnes. Unfortunately, we are still importing large amount of *kava* from neighbouring countries, which means there is huge potential to increase *kava* production and it could become of the leading crops in the country.

Honourable Speaker, we are looking at how we could restructure the industry and using the format of what we have for the Pine Corporation as well as the Fiji Sugar Corporation, which will and probably lead to the establishment of Fiji *Kava* Corporation. So in that, we will have a separate extension arm for *kava*, separate research arm for *kava*, separate grower registration arm for *kava* and it will *also* allow us to plan how we do the *kava* plantation so that we will have continuous stream of income for farmers who are involved in *kava*.

Honourable Speaker, at the moment, we really do not have any quality control on *kava*. People are consuming and no one knows what really is that they are consuming and assuming that it is pure *kava* but I think, in that industry structure, quality control will be a major aspect of the restructure of the *kava* industry.

Honourable Speaker, we are also looking how we could develop one of our most important crops, the Nut Seed Coconut. We are looking at the replacement of senile palms, promotion of coconut-based farming systems, we have integrated farming systems which is very successful in Taveuni where coconut farming is integrated with livestock farming, such as beef as well as dairy cattle. At the same time, we are also strengthening hybrid coconut production.

With the hybrid nuts, it has a lifespan of over 30 years whereas the Fiji Tall variety which has a lifespan of about 80 years. So, we are looking at both, we are not really switching completely to hybrid coconut production and we are now strengthening our Mua Research Station in Taveuni which is dedicated for coconut development and production of coconut seed nuts.

Honourable Speaker, in 2013, we produced 24,000 tonnes of coconut whereas in 2017, this has slightly gone down so we are looking at how we could increase production of seed nuts so that we can distribute and replace some of the aging and senile coconut plants.

Honourable Speaker Sir, fresh produce were high on our priority list. Currently, we are exporting \$50 million worth of fresh produce to our neighboring countries. We want, in two years' time, to double this and we have the potential to double this, as well as reduce reliance on imported fresh produce that is entering into our tourism sector, as well as some of the high-end supermarkets.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, to do this, we need to do three things; one is we are zoning areas based on what crop you want to plant; where on a commercial basis, and hook them up with exporters. So, we will be hooking them up to exporters by contract farming system.

We had our first very important meeting with the exporters and established an interim Fiji Agro Producers and Exporters Association and we have allocated a separate team of officials, staff from the Ministry who are organising the export sector, working very closely with the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) to support growth and expansion of fresh produce so that we can take advantage of the lucrative export market in Australia, New Zealand and America.

The advantage of that market, Honourable Speaker, is that, we have got our own people in Australia and New Zealand with the same taste and preferences and also psychologically, they want to consume Fiji's agricultural produce, Fiji's okra, chillies, cucumber, et cetera.

So, Honourable Speaker, there is a huge potential for us to take advantage of with this block market and we want to, in two years' time, to double the export that we are doing from \$50 million to \$100 million. But willy-nilly, we just cannot do that, but we want to structure the industry.

Honourable Speaker, this is the strategy we have and we are working very hard to ensure that agriculture will continue to play a dominant and leading role in the growth and development of Fiji's economy, as well as food security and providing livelihood to those who are engaged in the agriculture sector in the rural and maritime Division. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani. You have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement on the strategies for expanding the non-sugar crop sector. I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture for his enlightening speech.

This is a tiny discussion in view of the following issues, the:

1. decline in agriculture contribution to our GDP from 16 percent in 1995 to 6 percent of our GDP in 2017;
2. exodus of sugarcane farmers from the industry, whose numbers have depleted from 21,000 in 2006 to 13,000 as of now;
3. increase in the demand of locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables for local consumption and export purposes;

4. need to provide the basis of alternative livelihood for more than 50 percent of our population, who depend on agriculture for their main source of income and livelihood; and
5. our collective desire to diversify Fiji's agricultural sector and in the process, carry out sustainable development of our livelihood and natural resources.

That being so, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) proposed to the people of Fiji in its Election Manifesto of 2018 that our policy on agriculture will be guided by the idea of supporting food security and foreign exchange earnings through value addition. We perceive this proposed strategy spelt out by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to be in par with our quest and welcome. However, we have some serious concerns which I wish to share as follows.

Firstly, sugar contributes to only 5 percent of our GDP. We continue to pour an average of about \$60 million on an annual basis in the industry. That investment and the reforms have failed to revive the sugar industry. That being so, what about making a similar investment in the Non-Sugar Crop Sector as proposed in the Ministerial Statement? Is it timely that we welcome or just another façade to create a 'feel good' factor?

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has already guaranteed sugarcane price to \$85 per tonne of cane. Can the same be done for the non-sugar crops, for example, *dalo*, *yaqona*, ginger and dairy milk? Further to that, can the Government consider farm access roads which has been a problem to our rural farmers in their assistance schemes?

Secondly, we have had a FijiCare initiative but despite programmes funded under such land development, farm care, et cetera, how much of what is intended in this Ministerial Statement was achieved by that? What yardstick is the Government using from the FijiCare initiative to measure the success rate of the non-sugar crop sector or was it just another stunt of looking good?

Thirdly, Fiji's location, agricultural development, potential as an emerging exporter in agriculture (non-sugar crops) give us the advantage to deploy the strategies outlined by the Honourable Minister to enable us to remain competitive stakeholders in the regional agricultural market, but a lot depends on what we grow, how we market it and what do the growers get in return to remain and expand these types of activities.

Fourthly, majority of Fiji's agriculture activities as of now are subsistence-oriented than semi commercial. This is due to lack of Government arrangements to transform these farms and empower our farmers by grants, farm gate market concepts and accelerated pace of extension services. I brought to the notice of the Honourable Minister for Agriculture that in the south bank of the Sigatoka River starting from Nawamagi up to Bemana Village representing about 800 farmers, there is only one Extension Officer based at Raiwaqa.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Fifthly, farmers engage in non-sugar sector in rural areas are accustomed to communal life and need to secure assistance and market as groups rather than as individuals. This makes the concept of agricultural co-operative schemes an important doorway to open up the Non-Sugar Crop Sector.

I humbly plead with the Honourable Minister to look into these matters as part of his ambitious initiative and we would be too pleased to assist him and the Government of the day in the process to realise this concept, given the need to empower our farmers and transform our agricultural sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Kuridrani for his statement.

I now give the floor to Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, I rise to respond to the statement by the Honourable Minister, Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Honourable Speaker, most of what we have heard today has been a repetition from his earlier statement made on 13th February, 2019. Let me just point out one more time that in September 2017, the then Minister for Agriculture told the media that Fiji on an average, imported \$788 million worth of fruits and vegetables annually and had done so for the last five years. I am sure that this trend has continued this year. The Minister then said that this was a big concern.

We heard nothing that could change this trend, Mr. Speaker because the current Honourable Minister seems clueless on how to revitalise the industry which is one of his portfolios.

The Supplement to the 2018-2019 Budget does not make for good reading and these are not our figures, these are the statistics from the Government of the day. If our reading is right, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the GDP growth by sector statistics contained in the Budget Supplement shows that agriculture declined by 1 percent in 2018 from its base rate of 8.2 percent. Similarly, former not Government Agriculture reduced by 2.1 percent from its base rate of 2.7 percent.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister talked about the non-sugar sector and we have been inundated with complaints from many farmers, who were previously cane growers but have whittled down cane production because it is simply not profitable anymore, so what have they done? They have gone into goat and sheep farming. This venture had started doing well until a few years ago when the Ministry advised farmers to de-sex their breeder sheep and either sell them or slaughter and eat them. The farmers were advised that they would each receive a new breeder, most farmers readily complied.

Mr. Speaker in the last few months, we heard that the Honourable Minister has been around the country distributing a new breed of sheep for breeding and we were told by farmers that it is known as the Dorper breed and farmers bought a breeder each for \$100. Two of our candidates in Nadi and Tavua respectively did not receive the new breeder for obvious reasons and good for them because they escaped losses from what transpired next; a man-made disaster.

Soon after the breeder mixed with the rest of the flock, the rest of the sheep, including young lamb and even sheep ready for the market contracted a virus that developed facial sores. Many farmers lost a significant number of their flock, Honourable Speaker. In one case, a farmer lost 40 lambs and sheep, another lost 18 lambs. One farmer contacted the Honourable Minister through a former Minister, who said he was going to do something. The Honourable Minister got his Permanent Secretary to contact this particular farmer and soon the Director and Vets visited him.

Mr. Speaker, the farmer told us that the flock contracted the virus from the breeder that was infected when it was bought at a subsidised price from the Ministry. He was assured that the sickness will be cured over time but irreparable damage has already been done.

We were also told that the contagious virus has been contracted by goats now. This is the dilemma facing our goat and sheep farmers; this is the type of progressive development that the Honourable Minister is doing, Mr. Speaker, and we do have pictures that portray a very sorry and horrible sight. There is a question on this issue that I will be asking the Honourable Minister later today. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Qereqeretabua for her statement.

Honourable Members, we have one more Ministerial Statement but I will take an adjournment now for lunch. I have to receive a courtesy call from the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights in a few minutes time. I know the Minister for Forestry is waiting to give his Statement, but he can take his time, have his lunch and come back and inform us. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.21 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off before lunch and I call on the fourth Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Forests. You have the floor, Minister for Forests.

Assistance to MSMEs - Forestry Sector

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my statement to inform this august House of Government's continued commitment to supporting Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through the Ministry of Forests. This support is a vitally important component of our efforts to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities, while at the same time, achieving the sustainable management of our forests for optimum ecological, environmental and socio-economic benefits.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government is committed to Fiji's national development through enhancing economic growth, capitalising and merging opportunities and delivering services that are inclusive and impactful on the lives of ordinary Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, MSMEs continue to play a major role in development of the Fijian economy. In 2016 alone, they contributed close to \$800 million or 12 percent of Fiji's GDP. The FijiFirst Government is making great strides in developing and implementing policies that will make MSMEs the bedrock for economic growth that is both, inclusive and sustainable.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forests supports MSMEs in the forest sector through subsidy grants and other forms of assistance to help increase their profit margin. Since 2017, the Ministry of Forests, together with our development partners, assisted a total of 19 woodcarvers with tools and equipment worth \$150,000.

It was such a joy last week Friday to see the faces of the six latest recipients brighten up when they received their machines and tools, knowing that they will be able to enhance the quality of their products to attract the high-end markets and subsequently, make more profits. The Forest Subsidy Grant is helping the small businesses in the forestry sector realise their full potential.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forests also undertakes skills training in woodcarving and artefacts among other training, to build the capacity of the people, whose livelihoods depend on the forests. In 2018, the Ministry partnered with the Government of Indonesia where Indonesia deployed two expert woodcarvers and crafters to train many of our people who complement the services to our tourism industry. This has helped our local woodcarvers and crafters realise increased profits when their innovative handicraft products fetch higher prices.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forests aims to help the forest sector to sustainably manage Fiji's forest resources while increasing its contribution to Fiji's economic growth. Supporting the MSMEs in the forest sector will ensure that the sum total of the Ministry's work is reflected in the lives of the people and communities we serve. This is part of the FijiFirst Government's overall vision of building a better Fiji for all. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement made by the Honourable Minister for Forests with the assistance from his Ministry to SMEs in the forestry sector.

First and foremost, our natural resources are all gifts from God to mankind, to the first people of Fiji for our nation of Fiji. It was bequeathed from one generation to another for the use and preservation for generations to come. Unfortunately, the factor of greed which is now quite apparent in many of the poor development models taking shape in Fiji is looting and robbing us of our nature and future.

Secondly, while expediting forestry on commercial basis, it is important for us to remind ourselves of the original intent of the lease of forest plantations, particularly mahogany and pine. It was done with the view that given the recognition of landownership and their desire, as well as that of the then government (except this one Government, FijiFirst), to enable landowners to gradually move into the commercial market, the ownership, control and management of these plantations and be reverted to the resource owners.

For example, the capital structure of Fiji Pine Limited (1991/1992) Board Resolution was to establish three classes of shares, which were as follows:

- Class A belongs to the landowners which is 0.2 percent with voting and sole dividend rights for the landowners, with the value of \$100,000;
- Class B belongs to Government, 0.2 percent with voting right only with the value of \$100,000; and
- Class C belongs to Government, with 99.6 percent, with the value of \$69 million for the establishment cost or value.

The plan was that by 2016, the landowners would have paid over 50 percent of the \$69 million establishment cost and, therefore, would be in control and manage Fiji Pine Limited by 2016. That has not been done.

Also, at that rate as per the plan, by the year 2025, the whole establishment cost would have been paid off by the landowners, enabling them to have the majority control of the pine industry by holding 99.8 percent shares, with the Government only 0.2 percent. That, however, is now eclipsed by the many draconian legislations, Decree and now Act, in place.

For the mahogany industry, the promised timber sale proceeds to the landowners have not been paid to date for the mahogany industry nor any financial assistance or the commencement of any business activities in the mahogany industry. That leads us to question the Government whether the landowners as inherent owners of these competitive species of forests, what special measures are planned under the SMEs to assist and empower them to become major stakeholders in the forestry sector?

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are initiatives long before woodcarving - seedlings, nurseries, forests, milling, processing for timber exports, that is where we need the input of the resource owners first. We need to focus on those first before woodcarving. Who will benefit from woodcarving? The fact that these initiatives, under the ambit of SMEs will assist or is aimed at assisting and empowering Fijians across the board will, no doubt, add value to the local economy by job-creation and add value to the GDP.

However, the single most pressing concern in cases of all these grants of SMEs is how many of these initiatives that are funded or given technical support are monitored? What has been their success rate and how many of those initiatives have really created meaningful jobs and are adding to our GDP? I leave those soul searching questions for the Government to ponder upon. An inquiry would help in the situation.

MSMEs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are not a product of this Government but rather it was introduced under the SDL era in 2004. The only difference between the grant of MSMEs then and now is that, it was then given after the necessary screening and monitoring and many of those initiatives have grown to create jobs and add value while those meted out now have failed to do so.

It raises questions about whether the present grant of SMEs are intended for the purpose of empowering the Fijian people or to empower politicians in the ruling party by nurturing and entrenching vote buying politics as a new dimension to our political landscape. That is the tragedy of these SMEs, now shifting focus from economic empowerment to political expediency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this further raises the question on the grant of the SMEs as it is intended that this proposed case on the processes involves the criteria used to select applications. We express the hope that the Honourable Minister with his line Minister responsible for SMEs give some serious thought to these issues, now that Elections are over, remedy the situation as per the SME legislation as well as the ideals and principles of good governance.

To finish off, Sir, the agenda laid by the Honourable Minister for Forests in respect of this matter, is welcomed with reservations made by us. We are not against the grant of MSMEs to empower Fijian people, we are all for it, but we want it to be noted that this would not mean the abuse of the processes of systematic looting and robbing off landowners and where it affects the forests to further damage our natural cover and expose us to the many impending risks, resulting from climate change, or the looting of their rights and fair return to their resources.

Thank you very much, Sir, for giving me extra time.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca.

I give the floor to the Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I thank my good colleague, the Honourable Minister, for his Statement. While harnessing SMEs in the forestry sector, for example, the area of woodcarving, it is commendable. I fear that enhancing the horizons of the primary stakeholders in this sector has stagnated for years, without any tangible graduation for them to where they can one day reach the heights of exporters, wooden handicrafts like Jacks, for example.

Mr Speaker, only yesterday, and as mentioned by my good colleague, I read in the *Fiji Times* that the Ministry had gifted six men with work tools - six, Honourable Speaker, out of the hundreds or thousands who may wish to engage in this industry. No wonder, the Ministry is still trying to enhance horizons. The horizon may as well be a shimmering mirage for many. We have learnt also that people want to plant pine but the Forestry Department cannot supply enough pine seedlings.

Honourable Speaker, at the last Sitting, we were told about the revived energy of planting 4 million trees. How come the energy and effort is at odds with the SME growth for the forestry sector?

Mr. Speaker in the Government's five-year development plans for SMEs, many lofty targets have been written, such as broad policy objectives, such as:

1. Reforming of Micro and Small to Medium Enterprises business regulatory environment.
2. Improving Micro and Small to Medium Enterprises business regulatory environment.
3. Improving Micro and Small to Medium Enterprises access to finance.
4. Improving access to business training.

In that same Five-Year Development Plan under Forestry, the broad policy objectives are to:

1. strengthen sustainable forest management;
2. encourage private sector participation in plantation development; and
3. encourage the growth of timber product development.

There is nothing written about SMEs in the forestry sector, so no wonder the horizon is but a distant dream for those eager to participate in the industry, Honourable Speaker.

I would strongly encourage my colleague, the Honourable Minister, to please, correct the situation when the Budget is tabled in June.

I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua for his statement.

That brings to the end that Agenda Item. We move on.

Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 1st April, 2019, the High Court (Amendment) Bill 2019, will be debated and voted upon today. Debate will be limited to one hour.

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HIGH COURT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 1st April, I move:

That the High Court (Amendment) Bill 2019 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as has been highlighted when we introduced this particular Bill through the motion under Standing Order 51 which was, of course, moved on Monday, 1st April, 2019, we had three days to look at this Bill which actually has only three Clauses to it.

As highlighted on Monday itself, the amendments sought, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to remove the stated figures in respect of the number of High Court Judges that we should have at any point in time, as

we see that under the Magistrates Court Act, there is no stipulated number regarding how many Magistrates should be appointed within the judicial system.

The selection on the number of candidates or number of Magistrates we should have is done by the Honourable Chief Justice himself, through the Judicial Services Commission (JSC), and as per their budget, they can appoint as many Magistrates as required.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want a similar provision for High Court Judges. Just to put it into context, in 1997 we had 10 High Court Judges allowed under the law; then we had 12 in 1999; 15 in 2002; 18 in 2007; and finally, 25 in 2012; and that number remained since then.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill itself simply says that the requirement of the numbers will be removed and there is only one other miscellaneous amendment which is correcting the spelling. It was originally put down as “Judicial Service Commission” when really it should be called “Judicial Services Commission”, so we are inserting the alphabet “s” into that.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this Bill will actually be again adding to the independence of the Judiciary. As you know that under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the Judiciary is now also administratively independent. Before, for example, staff were selected through the PSC system. Now, they have their own staffing system and they are selected by the JSC so they are completely independent.

As required under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the Government always has to provide enough money to ensure that that independence is maintained. And we urge all Honourable Members of Parliament to actually support this because this will ensure a more efficient running of the judicial system in Fiji.

With those introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to support this Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open.

Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. This motion was passed on Monday under Standing Order 51. We do not want to revisit that but the basic purpose for the amendment is the removal of the prescription numbers of the Judges in the Act. But before I get into that in detail, let me just take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Chief Justice, His Lordship Anthony Gates, and to congratulate His Lordship, Kamal Kumar, who will be taking over.

The Chief Justice Anthony Gates has been in Fiji for some time but when I commenced practice in 1986, he was already here through the offices of the Government, the DPP’s Office thereafter he went into a private practice and joined the Steward Engage (I am not too sure), that Office is still here in Flagstaff, taken over by Mishra Prakash.

Chief Justice Anthony Gates became well known after two or three decisions after he was appointed possibly in 1999. Before the 2000 *coup*, he made two or three important decisions that had an impact in the political scene. One of which was *Koroi vs Commissioner for Inland Revenue* that is often cited and I often refer to it in this House, where he said in his principle statement that a Constitution (referring of course then to the 1997 Constitution) is like a bible, it is a living word. You can burn it, you can tear it apart but it always comes back. And he followed that up in that famous case of Chandrika Prasad which went right up to the Court of Appeal and the reason for the restatement of the Government in 2001. So two very important decisions.

As a Judge, I find him very well versed and I thank him entirely for that. There is one aspect that can be felt by all who are practising, is the efficient system, now that case management has been done and the continued training of the Judges and Magistrates. There is totally new narrative in relation to that and one that we can be thankful for to Chief Justice Gates.

There is, of course, one element that I disagreed with him when he joined the Government in 2009, but he has his reasons I am not sure what, he has not explained it. But I know there is an opportunity that there are decisions that he has to give, including the decision in the case of the Honourable Ratu Naiqama and maybe, he will explain in that, his reasons. I find him to be very rich and very knowledgeable and I wish him very well.

At the same time, I wish to congratulate His Lordship, Mr. Kumar. Mr. Kumar moved up through the system. I know him at first as a clerk for Young and Associates and I always feel that Judges who go through the process, who were clerks and became lawyers, are always very good. So, I feel that the Judiciary will be looked after very well by him, taking over from his predecessor, Chief Justice Gates.

In relation to the amendments, I wish to make a few comments broadly. I feel to note that the current legal framework for the appointment of Judges is not ideal and there is room there for improvement and I wish that Government look into that and to consider and ensure best candidates are appointed as Judicial Officers.

Honourable Speaker, previously, lawyers through the President of the Fiji Law Society had a say in the appointments. The President of the Law Society was a member of the Judicial Services Commission. Also, I feel it is unsatisfactory that we have the current position where the Honourable Attorney-General is consulted on each appointment. I feel that that should be reviewed and relooked at as a way forward.

Honourable Speaker, it appears that there is a bias against senior lawyers having considered for appointment to the Bench, given the influx of non-citizen Judges whose contracts expire every three years as required under the 2013 Constitution. I can name very abled senior solicitors; Hemendra Nagin, Subhas Parshotam, Ramesh Prakash, Kitione Vuataki, Rabo, who are all very senior and well learned in the law and good candidates. So, I hope and pray that going forward, this aspect will be looked at.

Honourable Speaker, the Fiji Law Society and the local legal and judicial fraternity had been emasculated and decimated since the 2006 *coup*. There were mass dismissal of the Judiciary in 2009 after the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution, there was the burning of the President of the Appeals Court Judge, Judge Ward's, home at Deuba in 2006, and his subsequent travel ban from Fiji prevented him to take up the position of Chief Justice of Tuvalu and the removal, of course, of the statutory role of the Fiji Law Society to licence lawyers by Decree.

There was also a raid on the Fiji Law Society Office, later the burning of the Fiji Law Society Office soon after the raid and all those seem indicative of the vendetta against the lawyers, evidenced by the refusal of the Government to allow the UN Special Expert on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers into the country and the travel ban under International Bar Association in Australia and New Zealand and the regional legal association being banned from Fiji when they wanted to come and see what is happening here. All those things happening here are totally unwarranted and it called for a review and recent mature thoughts as we develop in our democracy. So, please, do not let that happen again.

Mr. Speaker, I wish for and looking forward to the future that Parliament considers the US system where Judges and senior public officials, like Ambassadors, Judges, Ministers are confirmed by the Senate Committee so that there is public examination of their qualification and work record, especially for Judicial Officers rather than surprised announcements as we have here, where His Excellency the President suddenly swearing in a Judge and the Government does not announce their qualifications. So, that is a better position to look at as we move forward.

Those are my brief comments in relation to the amendment and I feel that this side of the House should be making comments in relation to that but at the end, we will support the amendments that is being put on the table.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Niko Nawaikula. I give the floor to the Honourable Lynda Tabuya.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to add on to the sentiments aired by the Shadow Attorney-General. There was a reference on Monday to an exchange between myself and the Honourable Attorney-General about the practice of hiring members of the Magistracy, who did not meet the qualifications as stated and certainly hope that moving forward into the future will ensure that the qualifications are met as he had outlined on Monday.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Well, it was not met initially after 2000.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Under the new rules. There were rules, even the old rules were under your Government in the hiring of Magistrates. We can see from 2010 onwards, there were Magistrates being hired straight out of law schools and he can confirm that and he knows that. So we have got to ensure that the practice of hiring Magistrates and the Judiciary are to conform to the requirements, Honourable Speaker Sir.

As my colleague had mentioned, it is important for the Honourable Attorney-General to tell the nation what consultations had been taken to come up with the increase in numbers. This, again, reiterated the need to not just fast-track Bills for the sake of it, but that it does go towards the Standing Committees because there is going to be a budget involved and to have the members of the public, that is important for democracy.

Honourable Speaker Sir, these are challenges to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General to invite the UN Experts on the Independence of Judges. The Special Rapporteurs have been applying to visit our country from 2007 up to 2014, but still no invitation is forthcoming. This is important, to engage and participate with consensus, this is all part of good governance.

Now, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the issue that he himself, the Honourable Attorney-General, is aware of the amount of backlogs that continue to be faced by the Judiciary, can you guarantee that the increase in the number of Judges will take care of this? We have not heard from him telling us about that or how this can be handled with the backlog of cases. Will the increase in the number of Judges take care of this, Honourable Speaker, Sir? He has not responded to that. Perhaps, there might be a

better idea that I could give him about handling the backlog of cases and this is practised in many jurisdictions that have quite efficient legal systems.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The suggestion, Honourable Speaker, Sir, instead of increasing the number of Judges is just to increase the capacity of our current Judges and that is what is called, "Judges Associates." Judges Associates will be paired with Judges, empowering our Judges so that they have Judges Associates to take on the work.

We have many, many lawyers who are coming out of law school and a good number are jobless. This could be a way of creating jobs for lawyers to be Judges Associates. Many good Judges started off as Judges Associates. There are clerks for law firms, as mentioned by my colleague, and so the backlog of cases means that justice is delayed and, "Justice delayed is justice denied". So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, again this is part of efficiency and responsiveness; these are tenets of good governance.

We have to review the Judicial System to see, is it delivering, is there good governance practises within the system? We have to become more efficient, we have to be able to increase participation from the stakeholders, including the lawyers, the Fiji Law Society as mentioned by my colleague and also making sure that the practice of hiring our Judges and Magistrates do conform to what is required in the law. Thank you Honourable, Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to address the issue.

First of all, Honourable Speaker, I think that this amendment is a good one. It ensures that the Chief Justice will then have an easier mechanism to appoint more Judges. It is one of those measures that will then address the same issue that Honourable Tabuya was raising, that it does ensure that there will be lesser backlogs, there will be faster movement of cases because there will be more officers to handle these issues.

It is not that the Chief Justice will, out of fun, appoint more Judges because there will be a requirement. The population is growing, there are more legal issues to be dealt with, in fact, I was just called by some person three days ago that she had a criminal case pending in Lautoka for a long, long time. And one of the reasons given to her was, there were no adequate Judicial Officers to hear cases. So this is one step in the right direction to ensure that there are easier mechanisms to appoint Judges, to hear the concerns and complaints of the people.

An issue raised by Honourable Tabuya is that, is there any legal requirement or has there been an illegal requirement for appointment of Magistrates? Section 105 of the 2013 Constitution makes it very clear that a person is not qualified for appointment as a Magistrate, unless he or she has held office in Fiji or has not had less than 10 years post-admission practice experiences as a legal practitioner in Fiji or in another country.

So there is mechanism here, Honourable Speaker, that no one can be appointed a Magistrate just like that, just like out of law school. There has to be a 10-year post admission experience and there are mechanisms that ensure that Magistrates or Judges who are appointed have a particular experience and calibre to be Judicial Officers.

Honourable Nawaikula mentioned some names that they are people who are experienced lawyers but have not been made Judges. There is a process for that, there has to be applications and I can name some Magistrates who have been in Law Schools with me or junior to me who have now been made Magistrates. There is Magistrate Deepika Prakash, Magistrate Solomone, they were in Law School with me; junior to me. They have been made Magistrates.

There was a legal colleague in the Attorney-General's Chambers, Honourable Judge Tuilevuka, he has been made Judge. The current nominee for Acting Chief Justice, Honourable Kamal Kumar, he is a local man has been made a Judge. So there is absolutely no truth in saying that there is special favour given to foreign officers to be appointed as a Judge or Magistrate. There are a number of local examples, whom we have made Magistrates and Judges and they have been performing very well in the office.

With that short contribution, Honourable Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister, I give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, thank you. I want to make a short contribution to the Bill before the House.

Honourable Speaker, my association with the Judiciary goes back a long time. I remember just coming out of school and I was recruited into the Judicial Department then, which was the Supreme Court of Fiji (now the High Court), as a Court Officer and later on, as Permanent Secretary for Justice. But during my time as Court Officer though, I had the privilege of meeting and working with so many local Judges, from Fiji and Fijians for that matter.

I have a few names here and I believe, Honourable Speaker, you know these Judges very well in the course of your career and your life:

- Sir Timoci Tuivaga - the former Chief Justice;
- Justice Mishra;
- Former Chief Justice, Daniel Fatiaki;
- Justice Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi;
- Our first woman Judge - Justice Nazhat Shameem;
- Justice Jai Ram Reddy, who went on to serve in the UN International Tribunal for Rwanda for five years;
- Justice Pathik;
- Justice Kishore Govind; and many more prominent Fijians who made our Judiciary and our people proud for their competency, qualifications and professionalism.

Honourable Speaker, I reiterate my point on Monday when this matter was first brought into the House where I had asked (I know that the requirements are set in law under the Constitution), that for those who will be appointing our Judges to, please, look internally first.

I know the Honourable Nawaikula had mentioned names of people who could well be Puisne Judges in the High Court of Fiji and there are many others. But I would implore those who are responsible for getting Judges to look internally first, and I am sure there are many qualified Fijians for that matter, who will do us proud on the Bench of our High Court.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, I support the motion before the House as anything to allow people better access to justice is something that needs to be supported, of course, but there needs to be certain ticks in the box that we would all be proud of. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua. I give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am not a lawyer, I am a layman as far as law is concerned but, Sir, I have (as you well know) enjoyed the powers of a Magistrate Class 3 (I do not know what that means in the scale), but I also enjoyed the powers of a High Court Judge as President of a Field General Court Martial.

I tried a soldier, charged with murder, I found him guilty and I was very happy that the then Chief Justice, the late Honourable Sir Timoci Tuivaga, upheld my verdict but reduced the sentence.

The Honourable Tabuya mentioned “justice delayed is justice denied” and I also would like to add that “to the pure, everything is pure”. We have witnessed some judgments passed down by Honourable Justices that we have and depending on where you stand after the judgment, you would probably say, “He is a bad judge” or “A good judge”, depending on the effect of the judgment on you.

At this time, I would like to congratulate the Honourable Bulitavu, who got the good news from the court case today and had an opportunity this morning to have a photograph taken with the journalists that the Honourable Prime Minister mentioned this morning, and they may put a caption on the photo, probably free at last, but do not speak too early yet.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill before the House is something that we must accept as part of our journey. We had a Census taken two years ago, Sir, and I wonder if the data from the Census had been incorporated into the increasing number of Judges and Magistrates that we allow ourselves to have, and whether it is a good image that we are portraying or is it just because of the number of the people that we have.

The population growth entails the same percentage of growth in the strength on the Benches and the Magistrates, I do not know. But it is something that must be handled and I congratulate the Honourable Attorney-General for bringing this in, but I hope we do not use them all. I hope they will not have enough accused appearing before them and if we go on with our social development and programmes, more and more people will never have the experience that I have had.

So far, I turned 70 last year and I have been three times in the High Court and twice in the Court of Appeal and I have had experiences I wish no one out there would have.

With those few contributions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill before the House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support the Bill before the House, tabled by the Honourable Attorney-General, a very important Bill as alluded to by him. Also, given that I will not only speak from a lawyer’s perspective but as a person that has gone through the Legal Judicial System.

For me, it took me eight years for the court system to dispose of my case. It started in 2011 and ended yesterday, that in itself tells a picture of the system that we have, and given that the current amendment seeks to allow the Judicial Services Commission for the Chief Justice to appoint, to increase the number of judges at any time, not to be prescribed by law, it is very important and in my time in prison, I have had the opportunity to write written submissions on behalf of inmates who want to appear in person in court, and do not want to further engage the services of a private lawyer or Legal Aid Commission.

In my experience there, I came to find out, Sir, that many prisoners are very, very good in understanding the law and the precedence. How they use it, they will apply the ruling of a particular judge from a case, they will use it for a sentence appeal on that case, on a conviction appeal on another, there is a big law firm that runs around in the prison channel.

Even the new ones who are dropouts from schools but they are very good in writing submissions. The limitations they have, given they only have prison letters from letters, it comes to the judges and the judges too, when they write their judgement, they do acknowledge the precedence and the level of submissions done by inmates in their submissions.

But an issue that they face is that, some of whom have been convicted in the High Court, their case to be heard in the Fiji Court of Appeal and some sit there in prison for two to three years awaiting their appeal to be called on a single bench before it is approved to go into a full bench, and even appeal to the Supreme Court it could take another four years.

These are some of the things, probably the Honourable Attorney-General can take note of and also the Government on how cases can be disposed given if this is the solution, increase the number of Judges sitting in our benches to dispose of those cases given they wait every day and they pray and also fasting that their cases to be heard. So, in the morning when the wardens move around for the standby in the morning, they normally call up people that will be produced in court in a day. Everyone is there, all waiting that their appeal will be called that morning, but those who got the chance, they come out and they are being very helpful to come and check the rest of the inmates in prison whether their case could be expedited, et cetera. Those are some of the real situations.

The other situation, Sir, was the need for more frequent judges' visitation to prison, a very important aspect where Judges can keep track of the amount of conviction and custodial sentences and punishment that they are given and the size of the prisons that are there.

We do not have overcrowding and other things that can affect the health of another human not to breach the Mandela's rule and other UN Conventions, that is something that will allow the Judges to keep track on a particular prison, in particular if the resident magistrate, say in Labasa, Savusavu or Suva to keep track of the prison at the Corrections Centre where most of those who are convicted are sent to.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given that the opportunity when judges go to prison they normally see a different person, than the person who stood in the accused box, sentencing him and the person they will meet in prison. In those interactions, it really helps out because the facts of the cases could be different and that particular person could be different. These are some of the things, that is why it is important to have a frequent visitation by Judges to prison to check out on the conditions of those inmates.

The other pressing issue that I came to find out was lastly, the high sentence given by our foreign Judges that are in the country right now on very young offenders, on convictions, like robbing a taxi or mobile phones. I found out about a case, just \$8, to get a sentence of say eight years, to get a

sentence of 9 years, it does not give that particular person, if he comes in at the age of 17 giving eight years, you know when he becomes 25 years, we understand that it is for the court to decide the sentence but again, it is something....

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It is not on only deterrent, it is on the other side.

When you look into the Yellow Ribbon Programmes on how to give a second chance to people, unlocking their second prison where they are able to be integrated into the society on how they are given more rehabilitation. Some young offenders when they enter they know a little bit of crime, so when they enter prison they learn more and when they leave, they become dangerous and big hard core criminals.

Those are some of the things probably we can look into. Once we look at the whole system, increase the number of judges and also look at other stakeholders who are part of the system. *Vinaka Vakalevu*, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General for his right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank all the Honourable Members who had actually stood up and spoke in support of this particular amendment. I think some may have actually supported it, perhaps in a convoluted manner, but the reality is that they all recognise that there is a need to give this latitude and freedom to the Judiciary to be able to appoint the number of Judges they want.

Mr, Speaker, Sir, there was a number of spurious comments made, I think by the Honourable Nawaikula about the Fiji Law Society being burnt, insinuating that it was done by the Government. There was never any case of arson, but these are the kinds of insinuations that have been made.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not say or insinuate that it was done by Government. Please, can you be frank and fair.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he gave a whole plethora of things that happened and apparently talked about the Judiciary under attack and in that same vein he talked about, he is smirking, he does not know about what he was saying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, I can go back into the Judiciary and the Honourable Leader of Opposition is very familiar with this when Magistrates and Judges were actually locked up in Naboro and Korovou back in 1987. We will not go and traverse on those grounds.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the now, and to talk about the now, is not insinuating but it is a fact. They were locked up; it is not insinuation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Judicial Services Commission at the moment, Sir, is made up of the Honourable Chief Justice who is the Chair of the Judicial Service Commission, the President of the Court of Appeal, the Permanent Secretary for Justice, a Legal Practitioner or in other words, a lawyer so we have representation from lawyers. But the Legal practitioner has got 15 years post-admission experience, and who should not be a lawyer who has had disciplinary proceedings against him or her. In other words we need a lawyer who has had a clean record. I think there is nothing objectionable about

that. And also a sixth person from a non-legal profession, in other words, someone representing the Civil Society, and that is what we have at the moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of comments were made about a number of Senior Practitioners who could be made Judges, and I think this was highlighted earlier on. They are quite free to apply. You do not go and select Judges, you actually get them to apply, and the Judicial Services Commission then assesses. The reality is that, as the honourable lawyers from the other side would know, most of the lawyers who are doing very well do not want to join the Judiciary because they make far more money in private practice.

I think the other point that seems to be coming from the Opposition is that, when they generally talk about the Judicial System they talk about the Criminal Justice System. They have to realise also that the Judicial System also encompasses the civil cases. There are a number of civil cases actually emanating as the economy gets a lot more sophisticated, as the outsourcing is done, and they get more private companies. There are a lot of disputes between private actors, and they need to go to an independent judiciary, for example, with their contractual disputes.

As the recognition we gave to the Honourable Chief Justice on Monday, one of the other important things that he has done under his tenure with the support from Government by providing the legal framework for it, is mediation. We now have a Mediation Centre so the whole idea is to reduce the amount of litigation that actually comes before the court.

Once you initiate the litigation, it does not mean that it will actually have to go through a trial process. I understand that one of the former partners of one of the accounting firms is now actually one of the mediators in the Mediation Centre. So that is also one way of what they usually refer to as getting rid of the backlog in the cases or getting a much speedier process through Judicial Systems for Mediation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I once again, without belabouring the point, would like to thank all Honourable Members of Parliament who have supported this. The Honourable Minister for Lands has also highlighted the fact that the qualification requirement is actually set out in the Constitution regarding who can be Magistrates. I can go on about when Honourable Chief Justice Tuivaga, during his time, had appointed people straight from Law School to become Magistrates.

We do not want to go into all those kinds of name calling. Let us talk about what is now, and this procedure is under the 2013 Constitution. To be a Magistrate, you must have, at least, 10 years of post-admission experience; to be a High Court Judge you have to have, at least, 15 years of post-admission experience and those are the rules, and we will abide by the rules, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This amendment will give the freedom, the latitude and the independence to the Honourable Chief Justice and the Judicial Services Commission to appoint the Judges and the number of Judges to the judicial system in Fiji. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday 1st April, 2019, that the High Court (Amendment) Bill 2019 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of ‘Noes’)

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

Motion agreed to.

(A Bill for an Act to amend the High Court Act 1875 enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. Act No. of 2019)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**INTERNATIONAL TREATIES/CONVENTIONS AND WRITTEN ANALYSIS –
STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS & DEFENCE**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move that the following Treaties, the:

1. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families; and
2. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;

along with the necessary Written Analysis for each Treaty, which contain recommendations for declaration under each Treaty, be referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for review.

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

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

I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaties and Written Analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2). Therefore, Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Treaties and their Analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table a Report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

(Treaties and their Analysis referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review)

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to move the motion.

**CONSOLIDATED REPORT - FIJI COMMERCE COMMISSION
2014 AND 2015 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates on the Consolidated Report on the Fiji Commerce Commission 2014 and 2015 Annual Report which was tabled on 14th May, 2018.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion. The Fijian Commerce Commission, now known as Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), is an independent statutory body. Upon deliberation and discussion with the FCCC, and given the time that had lapsed, the Committee chose to put forward a Consolidated Report for the years 2014 and 2015.

The Committee was confident that FCCC was well positioned to continue to play its role to accomplish its mission, which was to foster and competitive, effective, fair and informed marketplace to enhance the welfare of all Fijians. In 2014, the Commission received 882 fair trade related complaints, while only 384 were recorded in 2015. The increase in compliance was a clear indication that the Commission continued to strive towards efficient and effective practice.

This was also a testament of the Commission's effort to invest in the way they engage with their stakeholders to outreach programmes, such as radio talkback shows, educational programmes in the school and print media. The Committee strongly believes that FCCC's role needed to be clearly understood by the general public so as to ensure that they are fully aware of their rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to highlight some of the key recommendations by the Committee. Firstly, while the Committee notes the role of the Commission, it recommends that FCCC continues to strengthen the development of the communications strategy to effectively convey their role to the consumers.

The Committee recommends that the FCCC develop its network with independent stakeholders, such as the Asian Development Bank, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), to assist in resolving anti-competitive conduct, particularly when dealing with monopolies.

To conclude, the Committee felt that the consolidation of roles has been effective and that FCCC is poised to continue to play its role to accomplish its mission, which is to foster a competitive, effective, fair and informed marketplace to enhance the welfare of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few comments to enlighten the House, as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Chairperson and the floor is now open for anyone who wishes to take the floor.

Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, I rise to make some contribution in relation to the Annual Report of the FCCC. At the outset, Honourable Speaker, let me just say that this is a very professional body with some of our very capable and bright people managing this very important role for the consumer and for fairness in our country.

We were very impressed with what they have accomplished but as highlighted by our Chairman, they need to continue to strengthen their links with organisations that have been outlined like

ADB and IMF, because some of the anti-competition matters can be very complex and they would need to go outside of Fiji to bring in the expertise to decide on some of these issues.

That is the recommendation that we made very, very strongly and we hope that they will continue to maintain or develop that link with these bodies. There are certain issues that are beyond us in terms of our ability to resolve them.

However, I must express here, Honourable Speaker, that I was very disappointed during the last Election that the CEO whom I respected and admired a lot, I was impressed with the way he runs his organisation, he appeared to be expressing his opinion on some of the economic issues or the manifestos of the political parties competing in the General Election. And I think this was compromising his position. I was very saddened by that.

I had a lot of time for the young man but he had more air time than most of us, on television, on radio and in the newspapers. I believe he was placed in a difficult spot to express his opinion on some of the economic issues that made up our manifesto and it was almost like he was campaigning for FijiFirst. I think if you revisit what he did during that period, he was almost like he wanted a seat in the line-up with FijiFirst.

As I said at the outset, I was very impressed with that young man. He has his group of lawyers, accountants and economists around him, who made a very strong impression on us. Let me just give an example of the work they do. For instance FEA (and we also do the books for FEA); the new name now is EFL. With this Government, the way they rename everything, I hope one day they remove Fiji from the First. They do not deserve the name Fiji in their name.

Anyway, EFL, Mr. Speaker, has this development programme over the next five or ten years and it will cost them billions of dollars, which we will all want to see happen in this country. But they would have to raise the money to enable them to do what they want to do and the easiest way for them to do that is to increase the rates that they charge us (consumers), but they struggle to convince FCCC to allow that increase, which is the way it is. That is the way it is, we welcome that we have a body here that would regulate, monitor and decide fairly on what people like EFL would charge the consumer and that is Fiji. I see my colleague over here enjoying it because he knows what I am talking about.

While the hierarchy at EFL and the hierarchy at FCCC sit down to mix, it can be very stormy. They would stand up and leave the room and they would come back, but that is just part of Fiji. That is how we are structured.

HON. V. NATH.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member is a Member of this Committee and he also signed the Report. What he is picking on is totally not in this Report so he has to get back to the facts in the Report.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, we are talking about an organisation. He brought their Annual Report to us and it is our role as Parliamentarians to get to fully understand what they do, so I apologise that my Chairman is not fully aware of that, Mr. Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- He is a good Chairman.

This is an indication of what FCCC does. They look after us and as I said, EFL could very easily raise that money by increasing rates but they help the consumers and FEA cannot do that. So, FEA would have to go and find money elsewhere and that is very important. And I applaud that. That is the way we are structured, that is how democracy works but like I said, I was very saddened that someone I admired a lot and respected who was there, was being used in that manner by FijiFirst.

I just ask Government to be careful on how you use independent people who are parts of independent organisations. They are independent and they cannot be influenced by any political party. I think they owe us an apology for using the young man to campaign on their behalf, and he is a very convincing man.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So, Honourable Speaker, it is a fine organisation but as we say, people like that need leadership like SODELPA to really give them the freedom and the ability to play their role. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you for the opportunity, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I wish to rise and make a short contribution on the motion before the House and also support the motion.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I would like to thank the Standing Committee for the compilation of the Report and I also wish to thank the FCCC for the work carried out in 2014 and 2015.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we as Members of this august House should be aware that competition is fundamental in any area of the economy and consumers need to be confident that they are accurately informed and understand the prices they pay.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Committee's recommendations that the FCCC continues to strengthen the development of their communication strategy to effectively convey their role to consumers is very valid and also important.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the work of resolving anti-competitive conduct can be very complex, particularly when dealing with monopolies. The Committee's recommendation that FCCC develops its network in independent stakeholders, is timely.

Honourable, Speaker, Sir, I refer to the example the other day of unfair competition when my *Tauvu* and good friend, Honourable Gavoka, spoke on the issue of service tax. He said that service tax was good for the tourism industry and additionally, he stated that international hotels, like Sheraton, Westin, Hilton and Sofitel were used to service tax. He does not understand and he forgot that the service tax will affect the small businesses in the tourism industry, like the backpacker hotels, homestays and B & B.

While big international hotels may be able to absorb additional tax, ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- ... our Fijian owned small operators would be basically killed by removing the small profit that they had been able to achieve before the introduction of this service tax.

Whatever motion we introduce into this august House, Honourable Speaker, Sir, must be considered properly with wider implications, especially to our local people.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, yesterday Honourable Gavoka, again misled Parliament when he stated on Page 937 of the Uncorrected Copy of the *Daily Hansard*, and I quote:

“The report tabled today by the Chair of the Committee on Economic Affairs on PAFCO would highlight that because Levuka today is a high cost environment and a major part of that is port charges, it increased dramatically with the privatisation of this company, and we would suggest that to help PAFCO, the people of Ovalau, as you know, PAFCO employs more than a thousand people and benefits the whole province of Lomaiviti.”

Honourable Gavoka knows very well that PAFCO actually owns the wharf that loads and unloads fish to PAFCO. They do not operate out of the wharf that is owned by PAFCO so he is actually misleading Parliament. Everything that we bring to Parliament must be based on the truth and facts.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- A clarification, Honourable Speaker, ask PAFCO read their latest reports and they say that Levuka is a high cost environment and port charges is one of the two; oil and port charges are the two major costs. I think he has to withdraw that, Honourable Speaker. I am speaking from authority and I am really disappointed that the Honourable Minister of Fisheries does not know this. Thank you.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am telling the truth because the fish are loaded and unloaded at the factory at PAFCO. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, thank you. I promise to be short.

I thank the Committee for its Review Report. Obviously, the reports that were scrutinised started from 2014 and 2015, fast forward, Honourable Speaker to 2018 and 2019. Three to four years later the Commerce Commission is now known as the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission or FCCC as we know, and has a new Chief Executive Officer, than the one who was in office in 2014 and 2015.

Apart from its roles and responsibilities performed under the Act, FCCC seems to have expanded its role beyond monitoring and policing prices of goods and services, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, two to three months before the General Election last year, saw FCCC CEO public display of blatant political bias towards the current Government.

Honourable Speaker, the CEO was holding pocket meetings with people, telling them that politicians and provisional candidates were lying about reducing the cost of living. This was merely recorded by a cross-section of the media. The CEO was obviously referring to NFP since it is the only party that had publicly announced that it will reduce the cost of living by removing VAT on 15 basic food items, Honourable Speaker, as well as reducing duty on them and other selected essential goods.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, four years later from the Review Report of the 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports, FCCC's CEO had totally compromised the neutrality and independence of his position, as well as the head of the institution,

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Listen, Honourable Minister, you will learn something!

He should have remained apolitical and completely refrained from making political comments. An ordinary civil servant is disallowed from even being seen at political party meetings.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- He was seen at political party meetings or gatherings that it construed as showing support towards a political party. Mr. Speaker, we vividly recall that during the same period....

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Who wrote that?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Definitely not Qorvis. Definitely not Qorvis, Honourable Member!

Honourable Speaker, if I may continue.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. NATH.- A Point of Order. Honourable Speaker, Sir, my motion is simple, that Parliament debates on the consolidated report on the Fiji Commerce Commission 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports, not on what the honourable Member is speaking about. We are talking about the consolidated report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I am about to finish, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You know what the motion is about.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, we vividly recalled that during the same period when the CEO was openly politicking, owners and operators of higher education institutes owned by religious and cultural organisations were warned by the Ministry of Education to refrain from showing support to any political party. Why then were the rules different for the CEO of FCCC? He is paid by the taxpayers through Government funds allocated to FCCC?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is an independent body.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, but funded by Government.

Yet, he chose to campaign by maligning others under the guise of his so-called public consultations, Honourable Speaker. Instead of telling the people whether FCCC was unable to reduce inflation by ensuring there are lower prices for basic food items, he was twisting the queries by attacking us. This, Honourable Speaker, was blatant political bias from someone who heads a body that is supposed to protect the people and also to be independent.

Mr. Speaker, the FCCC is supposed to be an independent State institution. Its semblance of independence that it portrayed four years ago, is now lost. The FCCC and its CEO should be thoroughly independent of any interference, politicisation or political involvement, Honourable Speaker, but his pocket meetings under the pretext of public consultation were basically intimidating voters in 2018.

Mr. Speaker, we just saw this morning that the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights tabled the Report, following scrutiny of the Code of Conduct Bill. If anyone who is paid by the taxpayer, Mr. Speaker, wants to behave like a politician, he or she should resign their position and become a politician.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He was scared of his intellect.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- That cannot be the truth.

We again call on the heads of all independent and statutory State institutions to remain apolitical at all times, and not tarnish the image and credibility of their organisations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and once again, I commend the Committee for its Review Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also rise to contribute to that particular Report tabled today on the operations of FCCC. As highlighted in the Report from the Standing Committee, FCCC is well-positioned in accomplishing its mission to becoming a competitive, efficient, fair and informed marketplace to enhance the welfare of Fijians; this is well-recognised.

We have seen an increase in compliance to the current Act by businesses, as well as consumers, simply because they are aware of the legislation. This was only achieved through various awareness-raising programmes and I wish to commend the Commission's proactiveness, to ensure preventative actions, as opposed to only taking action after any breach has occurred.

The Commission is now moving towards becoming a multi-sectoral regulator. It is not only regulating the energy industry, it has moved into regulating telecommunications, as well as infrastructure.

Now, coming back to the two Honourable Members who were so disappointed when the FCCC CEO did the analysis of the Manifestos and presented it to the public, they felt that he was being political. In fact, if you look at section 2 of the FCCC Act, that empowers the FCCC CEO to analyse any document that affects the interest of consumers and I can tell you that around that time, politics cannot play dirty.

It cannot play with the lives of the people and that is precisely what some of the political parties

were doing. They were trying to reduce prices of beer, butter and lamb chops overnight. Anyone who is involved in the price analysis for over so many years know better what would be the implication on the public and this is not the way to get the votes.

So as far as the legislation is concerned, the CEO has the power to analyse such documents and this is an international practice. International practice is such that one can analyse manifestos, analyse any document and look at its implication on consumers and that is precisely what FCCC has done. You may not be happy but I can assure you there are many consumers out there who were happy because their interests have been corrected. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable RoTuisawau.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.-Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. Firstly, for our Chairperson of the Committee please, be rest assured that this is a Parliament debate. It does not mean that we are undermined, but it contributes to widen your knowledge with our contributions.

In reply to the Honourable Minister who just recently spoke, it is inconceivable that a particular section of an Act would be used to engage in political activities and if that is the case, then that person should stand in the election. It is simple as that because that piece of information and research is used to undermine the political process where political parties are engaged in. It is very simple to resign and stand in the election.

Going back to the report, if you look at lessons learnt and here I refer to the role of this particular organisation, one of the key roles mentioned is monitoring competition under the competition law. Here I refer to the implementation of the e-ticketing system and their ability to monitor this, and I question whether they are monitoring this or not, especially from the consumer perspective. Not only them but also the Fiji Consumer Council.

Honourable Speaker, in the last three or four months, e-ticketing customers (members of the public) have expressed great concern regarding some of the e-ticketing issues from all over Fiji. Sir, let me just read out to you some of the complaints received.

“I feel like I was the Consumer Council of Fiji and I was doing their job. For example, I was sitting in the Ministry of Education last week and parents were still visiting from the beginning of the year until Week 8 or 9 and the card was still not given to them.”

That was in Ba.

In another case in Vatukoula:

“I have my son’s new card but whenever I take it to Vodafone to top up, I was told that the money had not arrived. I have been paying for it ever since and it has not been free as reasonably intended.”

A similar case in Labasa and Lautoka:

“Before school started I went three times to Vodafone and the third time I went, it was still not there and they only gave \$45 instead of the \$75.”

So, what I am saying, I could go through may be 30 or 40 examples here. The question that I would like to ask the House is, what role is this organisation playing in monitoring consumer interests

for the members of the public, especially school children in terms of this particular issue?

I think a few years ago, you would also have seen on Fiji Television the case of a bus company where there was a mismatch in their data and also the one with Vodafone in terms of the revenue they should have been collecting - Sunset Express. I am not sure what is happening to them but then again, that is another area which should have been monitored.

When you look at the Report under lessons learnt, as you go below that, we can also note there the frequent changes in goods and services, prices, and we are all concerned about inflation. And one of the concerns which is coming from the members of public is the constant increase in the prices of basic goods in supermarkets, et cetera. I was wondering, in terms of not only competition, but under-competition, whether there has been an investigation on price collusion between supermarkets. It is very odd when you look at it. In some instances where prices have increased, it seems to be consistent across supermarkets so there is an issue maybe of price collusion there which could be investigated.

As you go down, there is mention there of substantial decline of the prices of computers, et cetera, mobile phones, but on the opposite side, the consumables have increased. The price of a simple printer is about \$60 but the price of the consumable ink has now risen from \$25 to nearly \$50, which is the same price as the printer. That is another area which, again, is an issue.

The recent issue, I guess, also related to competition which we need to look at, is the issue of contracts with regards to Fiji Roads Authority. I wonder whether the Organisation is also monitoring that, because a huge concern is the awarding of contract to China Railway Fifth Group (CRFG) in terms of the contract for the Central Division maintenance. I could not understand why the contract went to CRFG when in October, the same Organisation's contract was terminated for non-performance, for the Nakasi to Nausori Highway. So here we have Fulton Hogan's contract coming to an end with 400 workers left out in the cold, and we haven't heard anything about the transition of those 400 workers from Fulton Hogan to CRFG, which they have done in other instances.

For example, when the CRFG contract came to an end in October, the Government spoke about the transition of CRFG workers, to those who will be completing the Nakasi to Nausori Bridge Highway. But what about this case, what about this 400 Fulton Hogan workers? That is the concern related to fair competition and transparency which should be monitored by the Organisation. How come a company which did not perform and whose contract was terminated was awarded another contract immediately after that, just two or three months later? It just does not add up, it is illogical.

The last one mentioned in the Report is the rent freeze. Honourable Speaker, we understand the high cost of rent and housing. So in terms of that, we have discussed yesterday the housing problem and the various situations we have suggested in terms of low-cost housing. But then in terms of rents, there is a particular sector of the community who have low income but pay really high rent.

I have talked to a few of them and these include, airport workers at Nadi and those who are working as security officers in Nadi. Their rents are really high and maybe about 80 percent of their pay goes to the rent. That is something which we need to look at when we are looking at rent-freeze but please, zero it down to particular workers who are suffering. That maybe the particular sector which needs to be considered and closely monitored.

With those words, I commend the work of the Committee, and support the motion of our Chairman. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Jone Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I want to congratulate the Committee for their excellent work and I would also like to congratulate the FCCC for the work that they have done, the CEO, the Chairperson and the former Chairperson, who is now a Member of Parliament, for all the great work that they have done.

I was just listening to some of the commentaries that was going on and I could not resist standing up. If you look at the objectives of FCCC, section 2(1), and I quote: "... promote the interest of the consumers". What does that mean?

That means that if anyone says something that is wrong, it is the role of this organisation to make sure that the consumers know about it. So if someone says something that is obviously wrong, it is the role of this organisation to make sure that Fiji understands this.

We have heard this in the House in the past that it is all right for any Member of Parliament to say anything they want even if they know it is not true. But that is different from our understanding of what we, as Honourable Members of Parliament, always need to say and tell the truth. If we are going into a political campaign, people are talking about things that are obviously not right it is the role of the organisation like this to tell the truth. There is no political campaigning in that, it is making sure that people tell the truth about what is happening.

In other parts of the world, when you put a manifesto out during a political campaign, you have to cost the implications of your manifesto. You just do not have to say anything and expect people to take it down hook, line and sinker. So I congratulate FCCC for what they have done during that time, and people are trying to insinuate that they were promoting the agenda of FijiFirst.

They were playing their role and every now and then, if something happens, you always hear from the other side and they are always looking for a boogiemán. They have this siege mentality that everyone is out to get them. No -one is going to get you, you lost the Election, fair and square. That is it, accept it, move on - life goes on.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Please, let us get rid of this siege mentality. Let us focus on the journey ahead.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the Committee for the excellent Report and I endorse the recommendation on this Report. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will speak very briefly on the Review Report that is before the House. I would like to thank the Committee for the review that they had carried out when they reported on the Fiji Commerce Commission 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports.

First, from this side of the House, Sir, we appreciate that the CEO has the authority under the Act to carry out what he did before the Election, assessing the prices of goods and services in the market. But from this side of the House, we question the timing of his carrying out that activity.

Whilst we have the authority, we question the timing of when he did that. To us, in all essence, it just appears that he was trying to support a political party. That is the first issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I thank the Committee for the recommendations that they have provided to us. Firstly, they are saying that the FCCC should strengthen its communication strategy to effectively convey their role to consumers. We totally agree, they are working for the best interest of the consumers of this country and we hope that the Board of this body will move into improving the communication strategy.

The second recommendation is on the rent freeze which has been in place since 2007, Sir. The Committee states that the rent freeze since 2007 creates its own problems. We totally agree with that, Sir. We are of the view that the freeze in the rent is anti-competition. The rent should be driven by the market and there should be incentive and control for low income earners across the board, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The third recommendation is a regular review of the remuneration package, to ensure the retention of the best staff. We totally agree with that, Sir. We would like to recommend that the remuneration review should be based on public sector policy. The approach will create distortion in the market.

The last recommendation I would like to comment on is to work with other stakeholders through networking (we totalling support that) amongst stakeholders, employers, employees and Government, to ensure consistency.

We also view that the World Bank, the IMF and ADB, can only provide technical assistance to support capacity building but will not get involved in domestic market.

Thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to say few words this afternoon.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank you.

Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will be very brief.

Honourable Usamate actually highlighted section 2 of the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission Act, which I would like to reiterate because it leads on to the Mission Statement of FCCC. Section 2 says, and I quote: “It promotes the interest of consumers”, which includes, of course, issues that affect or are likely to affect consumer interests. The Vision Statement of FCCC, Mr. Speaker, Sir, says, “Fostering a competitive, efficient, fair and informed marketplace to enhance the welfare of Fijians.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to just say a couple of things. The FCCC is a conglomeration or the collapsing of three organisations, what used to be called the Commerce Commission, then we had the Fair Trading Department in the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and then we had the Prices and Incomes Board also known as PIB which was actually introduced back in 1970s when we had the oil

fuel price rise (the crisis that we faced), when we had various pricing on what was used to be called essential items.

FCCC obviously metamorphosised into a modern day organisation now, which addresses a number of issues and as seen from the contributions by Honourable Members also from the other side, there is huge expectations in respect of the scope of what FCCC should do. We got e-ticketing now, FCCC has recently been involved in the Jittu Estate issue where there have been complaints by consumers, a number of areas now that they are addressing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The fundamental premise of FCCC, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to provide informed decisions, informed information to members of the public, not just to companies that applied, for example, increase in tariffs or increase in rates, but also to the general members of the population. I frankly cannot understand why the Opposition is so much in arms about the CEO, who is simply fulfilling his mandate.

In Australia, which they are about to go to the elections now, you will see a whole gambit, a whole plethora of NGOs, independent organisations, even they are funded by the taxpayers. It is an independent organisation, notwithstanding the fact that it is funded by taxpayers, the Judiciary is funded by the taxpayers of Fiji but they are independent, as provided for in the Constitution. Similarly, FCCC is an independent organisation, even though the money comes from the taxpayers of Fiji or from the Government coffers, similarly with the Fijian Elections Office. So, you cannot say just because the funds come from there, it is not no longer independent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is that, if you go to elections in Australia, if a Government rolls out its policies, you will have academics, independent organisations criticising it, supporting it, questioning it and critiquing it.

Here, we had a situation where it seems to be that the NFP was most aggrieved by this information that was put out there into the marketplace by the CEO of FCCC and essentially, if you look at it, he was talking about what was the impact of those policies and what does it mean to help people make informed decisions, simply as that.

We have lamented the fact so many times in public, we have said it in other gatherings too, we wish when we have election time, whenever we have a budget that we have independent professionals coming out and critiquing it. That is what we need, to be able to have a mature system in Fiji. We need to have this kind of political, economic, socio-economic nuances for us to be able to make good decisions and to have actually critique it. They should not be frightened of that, unless they have something to hide. If they had something to hide, in other words, you are trying to hoodwink members of the public then, of course, they will feel aggrieved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I personally feel and I am very passionate about this because I have seen in some of the organisations in Fiji that are now resourced by young, bright and intelligent people, young Fijians. And as was acknowledged, I think it was one of those rare occasions that Honourable Gavoka and I would actually agree on something when he stood up, but he got up, meandered off and went on tangent as usual.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the CEO of FCCC is sitting there in the gallery, Mr. Joel Abraham, who is the product of Votualevu College from Nadi, originally comes from Vanua Levu, so Honourable Bilitavu, you can take some credit for that. But this young man and his team have done a fantastic job. His Manager Operations is sitting next him.

These people are doing a fantastic job, Mr. Speaker Sir, they are now dealing with very sophisticated issues within the market and the level professionalism is phenomenal. I really think please, at least, Honourable Members on this side, let us put our hand together for him and his team.

(Applause)

We need to harness young Fijians like this.

And I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker Sir, I have had a number of multilateral organisations wanting to steal people like him, so they can take him away and put them in their organisations, offering three times the money that we are offering them, and that is a fact.

So, Mr. Speaker Sir, the fact of the matter is that the FCCC is, of course, driven by its own agenda, driven by its own Act, and as acknowledged that they are now working organisations like ADB, to build that level of sophistication in the manner in which they can deal with, for example, price increases, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker Sir, FCCC is very important in a modern day economy as we find, for example, the equivalent of it in Australia. Now, FCCC, for example, when investors come to Fiji and if the EFL or Ports have been used as examples, when they come into the marketplace they want to know that when they actually go and apply for a price increase, that the organisation that they are dealing with, firstly, is independent of Government. Secondly, that they will apply modern day market economics and other standards as applied to assessing price increases. That is what gives it confidence, and we believe that FCCC is precisely doing that, to give that level of confidence to investors in Fiji. So, they play a very pivotal role, Mr. Speaker, in that respect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding, for example, the rent issues; there is, of course, a rental freeze on residential properties. One of the reasons that Government has actually maintained this is because there is a low stockpile of homes and given that demand is higher than the actual supply, they could not actually be market fixing the prices.

The Honourable Ro Tuisawau said about rental but he should also know that Honourable Aseri Radrodro has had some issues that he has referred to FCCC before. Some matters had been resolved and he would acknowledge that, and many other people have actually approached them. So, my statement today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Honourable Ro Tuisawau knows of people being hoodwinked by Vodafone or some rental issue, please, take it up to FCCC. They will deal with it, they do not see you as a member of SODELPA or member of NFP or member of FijiFirst, they see you as a citizen of this country, a consumer who has actually got a grievance and they will fix it up.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we think the capacity that has been built up at FCCC is looking forward is that, one of the things that we most definitely will be doing in the Budget is that we will be putting it under Head 13 which is where all the Independent Commissions' budgets come from. And, of course, there is an opportunity to do further work with the Consumer Council of Fiji, so that we avoid duplication in that respect and how we can get the synergies involved in that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, of course, we need to fund it. There are many organisations, for example, whether you are a steelmaking company, whether you are EFL where you want to increase the landing fees, whether you are Ports Corporation Limited, we believe that the assessments now should be paid for by these organisations because they will actually get an assessment done. In that way, like in other models in other countries, these types of organisations actually become self-sustaining and they also start providing actual advice and professional advice to people in the marketplace, and they are highly sought after.

The last point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, they become a multi-sectorial regulator in terms of pricing and we are getting more and more of that happening in the marketplace. For example, many people over here do not know that when you make a phone call from say, a Vodafone number to a Digicel number or when you make a phone call from a Digicel number to a Vodafone number, we have what we call ‘termination rates’. So, because Vodafone, for example, has got the largest share in the market, they have got almost 80 percent of the consumers, Vodafone has a more prominent position in the market. So, an incoming operator like Digicel, Vodafone could say, “If your people, are using your number, calls a Vodafone number we would charge a higher rate for what we call, call termination” where their call terminates and Vodafone picks it up. They regulate that. We need that type of regulation to take place because we want to provide actual competition. Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now getting them involved in the pricing of supply of Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they play a very critical role, there is a lot nuances now within the market and we need them. We need to beef them up, give them the level of support, not run them down publicly because of some political issue you have. Please, look at the big picture, the wider picture. Look at what is happening in other jurisdictions. They do not mind independent bodies critiquing things. When we criticise one policy, it actually helps us to be better, and that is what this side of the House, we are very much open about and keen for that to happen. And indeed, they make submissions, we give budget submissions to them to see if it is going to work.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Committee for this work. I think they have done a good job in critiquing and I think FCCC is very, very pivotal, and we should all support this wonderful organisation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General.

Minister Parveen Bala, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Honourable Speaker, just briefly, I want to contribute. On my observation, I think it is a very serious matter and this is where FCCC has acted on a very timely manner.

Honourable Speaker, there is a report here which says, and I quote:

“Another scam which happened in 2014/2015 was the case against Mukesh Naidu. Currently 118 cases remained in the Court filed against Mukesh Naidu in regards to the land. Mukesh Naidu took deposit from consumers and promised to provide the land but failed to deliver.”

Honourable Speaker, now I turn to Page 3, where the Chairperson had made a comment, he said and I quote:

“The Committee was confident that the FCCC was well positioned to continue to play its role and accomplish its mission which is to foster a competitive, efficient, fair and informed marketplace to enhance the welfare of all Fijians.”

Honourable Speaker, what I would like to demonstrate to this House is, how FCCC has assisted hundreds of families in Sakoca. This gentleman was given a development lease by iTLTB to develop, subdivide and issue lots. Those poor tenants basically residing in Sakoca, were running here and there, so the only organisation that came into place and to assist at that point in time was FCCC. Honourable Speaker, after that, Government intervened, Government paid the premium again to the landowners and now that area, the subdivision process is under the Ministry of Housing.

Honourable Speaker, what I am trying to say here is that, FCCC is to be commended for saving hundreds of families of Sakoca. Had it not been for FCCC, those people would have lost their money and they would have been asked to go somewhere else. And today there is around 400 to 500 families are residing in that area, so I would like to commend FCCC for their action in this particular area. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Selai Adimaitoga. You have the floor.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Thank you, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, I wish to make a contribution to this debate. As a woman, I would like to applaud the CEO because there is a woman as a General Manager for FCCC and that is why I want to make a contribution to this. We are into the women gender balance, so I thank the CEO for appoint a woman there as General Manager at FCCC, and they have done tremendous work. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

I now have the honour of giving the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for his right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Members for their contribution.

Honourable Speaker, just to get a few things in order. Honourable Tuisawau had mentioned, probably misleading the House that the China Railway Group was suspended and was again given a maintenance contract. I wish to put it on record that, that maintenance contract was awarded to China Fifth Group and not China Railway First Group. It is the fifth group that was awarded the contract, so he is misleading Parliament, Honourable Speaker.

I also would like to thank the Board Chairman, Mr. Juen Yuan, an Economist by profession, the former Acting CEO and current CEO for their excellent work and the contribution towards this Report, I would like to thank them too.

With those few words, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson.

Question put.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, before we move on, there is an important aspect in this afternoon session that we need to attend to.

For the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow a suspension motion to be moved. And I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I move under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Orders 23(1) is suspended, so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today, to complete all the remaining Items as listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, as listed in today's Order Paper under Schedule 1, we still have four Motions for debate and, of course, under Schedule 2, we also have the eight Questions, thus the motion before the House for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there anyone wishing to take the floor?

Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, you have the floor.

LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Sir, thank you, I have no further comments.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete all the remaining Items as listed in today's Order Paper. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no Member opposing, the motion is agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- What you do, Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, you make yourself and myself the most unpopular members of this House when you move the suspension motion. You should see the looks on the Members' faces.

We will now adjourn for afternoon tea and the Secretary-General will give you the signal when we should start. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.34 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.08 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to move the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REVIEW REPORT – FIJI HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Committee on the Fiji Higher Education Commission 2015 Annual Report which was tabled on 5th May, 2018.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion.

You have the floor, Honourable Chairperson.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the review that was made to the Fiji Higher Education Commission's (FHEC) 2015 Annual Report which was tabled on 5th May, 2018.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, under the 2013 Constitution and Parliament Standing Orders, it aims to enhance transparency and accountability by public agencies and officials. The Committee's review was focused on the areas of budgetary allocations, functions, administration, legislation policies, organisation structure, projects, programmes, achievements and challenges encountered.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Higher Education Commission is mandated and guided by the provisions in the Higher Education Act 2008, Higher Education Regulation 2009, Higher Education Qualification Regulation 2010, Higher Education Qualification Amendment Regulation 2013 and the Employment Relations Act 2009.

Overall the Commission's performance in 2015 was satisfactory, however, after our deliberation and consultation process, it was identified that there is room for improvement towards enhancing the Commission's performance levels for efficiency purposes and effective service delivery.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have noted a few issues that the Higher Education Commission encountered to fulfil their 2012 and 2015 Strategic Plan and this is inclusive of their budgetary allocation. This is in terms of fully meeting all projects and programmes implementation costs as obligated in their plan.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, another issue that was identified was the availability of a central database for the Commission to record all graduates' profile for all tertiary education institutions, so that this could be used by the Government in consultation with all other relevant stakeholders in making policies, as well as in addressing employment issues through the National Employment Centre.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, lastly, the third issue that was identified, was the high turnover rate of staff. The Committee has proposed for a review of staff remuneration to counter the market rate and also for knowledge retention purposes for the Commission in looking at the future.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Fiji Higher Education Commission's progress throughout this period. It is important to note that given the years that has lapsed, some of this Committee's recommendations or a way forward for the Commission has been addressed or is in the process of being resolved.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those few comments, as a Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Chairperson. The floor is open for debate on this motion.

Honourable Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I wish to make a contribution to the debate on the motion before the House, which deals with the Review Report of the Fiji Higher Education Commission's Annual Report of 2015.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to pay my special tribute to the late Dr. Richard Wah, who played a defining role in the establishment of the Commission, and the success of the Commission is highly due to his efforts and leadership. May his soul rest in peace.

While Dr. Richard Wah's contribution to the Fiji education is that of a success story worth of a celebration or worth of note, it ends on a somewhat tragic note with his unceremonious removal from the Commission because he refused to be a 'yes-man'. Earlier, Dr. Wah, who worked under the former Honourable Minister for Education was a man of principle and he lived that credo to the end, with the conduct of his character...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- ...and life, inspire the many more principled people we need in Fiji.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a good sign that a number of institutions of higher education, were held up Fiji in recent years but the risk is, how many of these institutions of higher education do really offer universally-accredited courses? This is something that the Commission needs to determine and polish regularly so that people who study and obtain qualifications from these institutions do not end up with nothing.

I say this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because in some cases, parents of some of these students in institutions, obtain loans or withdraw from their FNPF to pay for the enrolment of their children into these higher education institutions but the qualifications these students obtain are not accredited, and I am sorry that they would be at a considerable loss after spending so much money in these institutions.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are thankful to the Government of the day for the budget provision to the Fiji Higher Education Commission, the Opposition strongly feels that the budgetary provisions have not been fully and properly utilised to achieve the objects of the Commission.

When you have millions of dollars at your disposal, the Minister should seek to divert or perhaps, alter the budget and when the Director refuses then they remove the Director. When you have that kind of budget, there must be strategies for research and development, inspection and review the

guidance to the institutions of Higher Education in order to excel and to struggle to deliver this higher education.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite amazing to note that having ridiculed the Opposition for calling upon the Government to incorporate Technical Colleges in Fiji with the Fiji National University, the Government has finally come face to face with the reality and is now finally doing what we had proposed then. It just demonstrates how advanced the Opposition or maybe rather backward the Government is.

Technical Colleges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, should have never come up in the first place. We had advocated for secondary schools with vocational departments to be developed rather than introducing Technical Colleges.

With Government intervention, Technical Colleges have come up like mushrooms in a field without any proper planning and discussions with respective stakeholders. These band-aid solutions have not assisted the Ministry of Education at all, especially the Fiji Higher Education Commission. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a result, students are displaced and they had to look for alternative institutions because Government has failed to plan and consult well.

I have been reliably informed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Technical College of Fiji is not registered as an institution of higher education since 2010 and is running free for all. The Honourable Minister for Education, I am told, is still trying to secure them the registration as an institution of higher education. Just imagine the plight of the students who had been through the walls of these higher education institutions. Where will they end up in terms of what they have achieved? They should be the engine room of the Ministry of Education.

It is, therefore, a little wonder, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Education is trying to find the easy way out for Technical Colleges by merging it with FNU, as she had alluded to yesterday.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Fiji Higher Education Commission is faced with a number of challenges pertaining to the delivery of higher education, by grooming a productive labour market and in substantiating the work of other statutory bodies in relation to education and employment. This makes this Report and the activities of the Commission important and notable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the appointment of the new Honourable Minister for Education and her Assistant. There is a lot of hope on them, given their experience as practical teachers in a classroom. I urge them to live up to the expectations of our people and empower the Fiji Higher Education Commission to strive ahead, an issue that we hope the two Honourable Members will fix the leakages in terms of hiring, terms of appointment of teachers and their work conditions.

There are numerous complaints that have been received from the teachers regarding their work conditions and we hope that the two Honourable Members - the Honourable Minister for Education and Honourable Assistant Minister for Education, look into that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, for his contribution today.

Honourable Minister for Education, you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Fiji Higher Education Commission 2015 Annual Report.

I take note of the Honourable Leawere's concerns and I think those are the issues that we can discuss at a later sitting when we come to the Ministry of Education and its operation. Now, we are debating the Fiji Higher Education Commission's Report 2015 and we are in the year 2019, of course, a lot of progressive sites have been made when it comes to the Fiji Higher Education Commission's operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, established in 2010, the Fiji Higher Education Commission is the statutory body responsible for regulating the establishment, recognition, operation and standards of higher education institutions, specifically to grow together and educate in a globally competitive Fiji.

As with all organisations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is always room for improvement to bring about efficient and effective service delivery as the Standing Committee has identified. The specific area of focus for the Fiji Higher Education Commission was and remains quality and relevance through the accreditation of institutions and their programmes and the promotion of quality assurance in general within institutions. The Fiji Higher Education Commission operates various Committees to achieve its mandate, including the Fiji Qualifications Council, Recognition and Registration Committees, Committee for Accreditation of University Qualification and Industry Standards Advisory Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FHEC underwent a review by the Asia-Pacific Quality Register Review Team, resulting in a substantial compliance rating which granted the Commission registration in the Asia-Pacific Quality Network Register.

The Fiji Higher Education Commission has and continues to focus on:

- Quality academic and corporate governance;
- National standards and qualifications;
- Quality assurance of courses and programmes;
- Encouraging life-long learning through pathways and progression opportunities;
- Administration of the Fiji Qualification Framework; and
- Fostering collaboration between institutions and industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission underwent a revitalisation process restructuring its staff and operations and developing a new strategic plan supporting the Tertiary Education Strategy 2016 to 2020. This established a sound foundation of relevant and consistent training which is internationally recognised to sustain economic growth and developing a culture of continuous improvement. These commitments hold true today.

Mr. Speaker, the commitment of the Government to quality in our higher education institution has led to an increased budget appropriation since 2015 and mentioned in the recommendation. From 2015 to 2018, the budget has rose three-folds actually, it now stands at \$2.8 million. This will continue to support the measures to ensure quality of oversight, as well as upskilling staff and reducing staff turnover.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the support received from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade who have supported the Fiji Higher Education Commission since 2015. This has allowed funding to be allocated through the Fiji Higher Education Improvement Programmes which is in place until 2021. While we hope that this support will continue, the Fiji Higher Education Commission is taking steps to source alternative funding, if required.

Again, as mentioned in the Annual Report, data and information are critical to ensure fact-based decision-making. Since 2015, the Commission has been working to establish a database to coordinate

data from all Higher Education Institutions. Inevitably, the Higher Education Institutions have their own systems but I am delighted to inform the House that the Ministry's database is supporting the function.

All Higher Education Institutions, as part of their grant agreement, will now be required to share their information with the Fiji Higher Education Commission to enable better data and decision-making. Combined with other higher education data, such as attendance, teacher qualification and results will also contribute to a greater understanding of this sector. This will then facilitate longitudinal tracking of students through their entire academic career, from ECE to Primary to Secondary to Technical College and other Higher Education Institutions and ultimately, their entry into the workforce.

The second data collection mechanism is the National Qualifications Register that will provide public information on the recognition of qualifications and the profile of registered Higher Education Institutions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the aim of the National Qualification Register is to list information on the qualifications and Higher Education Institutions that have been quality assured and met the criteria for accreditation of qualifications and institutional registration. This will also include, past and present qualifications accredited on the Fiji Qualifications Framework and the past and present registered Higher Education Institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the Registrar of Higher Education Institutions is being developed. Discussions on the information to be gathered and the development of the Register is ongoing between the Commission Team and all its stakeholders.

The Fiji Higher Education Commission is also engaged in four other projects, focussing on collecting data from students and stakeholders. These are the:

1. Access and Equity Research of Higher Education in Fiji, ensuring that learners have the best possible opportunity to gain relevant qualification required to support and sustain Fiji's economic and social prosperity.
2. Higher Education Data Analysis to analyse general trends, patterns, forecasting and relationships.
3. Fiji Higher Education Commission Performance Survey is a national survey to evaluate its performance as an organisation to valuable feedbacks from educational institutions, learners, various Ministries, employers and other relevant stakeholders on their views of the Commission as a regulator of higher education in Fiji.
4. Fiji Graduate Outcome Survey to gain insight into career destinations, the professional development trajectory of graduates, perceptions of the graduates regarding the Higher Education Institution courses and programmes, insight into the state of graduate labour market.

Honourable Speaker, there is also mention in the recommendations about the Workforce Development Strategy. This is a joint responsibility. A scarce skill list from Commerce Employers Federation and the Civil Service has been compiled and we have been talking with the three Vice-Chancellors to address this and each organisation in Fiji needs such a plan and address the needs, of course, with coordinated national training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to ensuring the continued growth of the economy and to do this, we need to ensure that the Higher Education Institutions specifically our universities, meet market demands. To this end, the Fiji Higher Education Commission has an important role to

play. But all our institutions in Fiji also need to develop, as I spoke about the Workforce Plans and the Ministry can work with the Commission and education institutions and industry stakeholders to address ways to address our skill shortages.

Already, my Ministry has informed the Universities of the shortages identified by the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation and the Civil Service and, of course, this list needs to be completed so that we can have a clear way forward for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I sit down, going back to Honourable Mikaele Leawere's comments about issues facing the teachers, yes, we are on track, we are addressing the issues. I am not saying that the Ministry is perfect. If I can go back to the previous session where the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa mentioned that this Ministry has long standing issues and these solutions will not be found overnight, but sometimes with the negativity that comes from the other side, I do not know why there is so much negativity. There is so much positivity out there.

Honourable Members on the other side sometimes talk as if all the teachers are not happy teaching in Fiji. I also go out and meet the teachers and I assure them we are working towards addressing these issues, and I think that is the way forward. When we come into this Parliament, all we hear is what happened in the past. What happened in the past?

Let us look forward, please, let us look forward. Criticisms are good, but I urge you all, let us talk with positive criticisms. My doors are open and I said in the beginning that I am open to criticisms, I am open to suggestions, as long as we do it the right way.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Yes, but Honourable Mikaele Leawere spoke and said, "we need teachers." I need teachers too and we are here to work for the teachers. They are civil servants, very important stakeholders within the education system and I also believe that happy teachers will create a happy classroom. So together, I am sure we can leave the past behind and look at the year 2019 as a way of moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Honourable Speaker, thank you so much for giving me time this afternoon. I just want to pat the Honourable Minister for Education on the back. And it just not Honourable Selai Adimaitoga who is praising the women from that side, we are doing the same here, so I think you are doing a good job, Honourable Minister for Education.

I have two points, we had four but the Honourable Minister has already spoken about two considerations in thanking the Standing Committee for this Review Report. She has already said that there is an increase in the allocation to support the Commission's function because that is one area that the Commission was very stressful about in the past few years. So thank you for that, Honourable Minister.

The second issue that the Honourable Minister brought up was the central database because that is something that is needed for proper and relevant planning into the future.

The two issues that I think were not addressed is the staff remuneration because there was a

high turnover of staff in this Report to other tertiary institutions, private sector and overseas.

The second point that I think needs to be looked at also is the establishment of a workforce in partnership with other key stakeholders, to monitor and evaluate the supply from the tertiary institutions to meet market demand.

These are the four issues we would like to be considered, from the Opposition:

1. The need for the Fiji Higher Education Commission to work with other agencies of Government.
2. The need to ensure that effective use of resources are not overlapping activities that is on education, NEC and Board of Supply (BOS).
3. The duplication of roles with the Ministry of Education. There should be very clear demarcation of roles to minimise overlapping and there was a concern about the Minister, who was Minister at the time of this report, that there was a lot of interference by the Minister which I am sure is not happening now.
4. As a small population, we must consolidate institutions rather than creating more entities which create inefficiency and wastage of limited Government resources on duplication of overspending activities.

In conclusion, as promised by the Honourable Minister in 2014, an Education Commission is to be considered to review our education sector for better coordination and minimise wastage and realign these programmes and curriculum to the labour market. When he said that, we were very happy and looked forward to an Education Commission because that came about in his Maiden Speech around the country and then when he suddenly felt silent, Honourable Speaker, we wondered what had happened to the Education Commission as promised. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for the statement. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you very much ,Honourable Speaker, Sir. I just wish to raise few matters with regard to education, particularly under the watch of the Higher Education Commission. By the way, this Higher Education Commission was established during the SDL Government, I think Tupeni Baba came with it and we are thankful that it is continuing and we are making improvements to it.

Secondly, this Higher Education Commission seeks out responsibility from the public and private education institutions on how they are being registered and how they perform, in particular, some had been accepting money and not doing the job that they were supposed to do. For example, Aptech, they are closed and are not returning money to the clients or to the students. Those are the kinds of things that the Higher Education Commission need to look at properly and make regulations not to arise.

In other words, they need to properly register private education institutions, to ensure that the process has gone through a proper way of doing things. Again, duplication of Higher Education Commission and the Ministry of Education, perhaps that need to be looked at properly on how they can interlink properly so that we have the role of the Ministry properly done and also the role of the Higher Education Commission.

As we have heard, we need to review the education sector, particularly the Ministry of Education in the way that the Permanent Secretary for Education is handling this Open Merit Recruitment Selection System (OMRS). I think it needs to be looked at properly, particularly the way you select and recruit teachers for medium and small schools.

There has been a lot of transfers and promotions that are really unfair and the criteria of qualification, experience and performance are not taken into account, they merely take into account the qualification. As a result the performing teachers in medium schools are being demoted to smaller schools with their salaries reduced, they are about \$7 - \$10,000. How can we be so cruel?

Also, there are still teacher shortages in Fiji at the moment, and we need to look into that particularly, we need to have teacher production in future.

We need to look at their pay as well, you do not have to pay your teachers \$3, \$7, \$10 or \$14. At the beginning of this year, they were paid that.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker Sir, it is important that the Fiji Higher Education Commission controls and gets this in order within the Ministry of Education. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Honourable Jone Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you Mr. Speaker ,Sir. Thank you for the opportunity to talk on this Paper on the Fiji Higher Education Commission. I, for one, would like to congratulate the Fiji Higher Education Commission for all the wonderful work that they have done.

Today, we have heard people on the other side trying to take credit for all that is being done. My senior old boy who has mentioned the fact that all these happened under the SDL Government, in fact, the Fiji Higher Education Act or the Decree at that time came out in 2008. Who was looking after Fiji in 2008, is the question. Was it the SDL Government?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- He said SDL. In 2008, it was the Bainimarama-led Government. That is the first point. A blatant untruth?

The Fiji Higher Education Institute, as an organisation body, came into place in 2010. There has also been a lot of talk, and I think the Honourable Leawere trying to take some credit. A lot of the initial work that led to the development of the Fiji Higher Education Commission was around the establishment of the Fiji Qualifications Framework where they tried to put a framework together, to put all the qualifications in Fiji to be based on industry standards.

We know about this because we were involved in a lot of the early work from the early 2000 up to the time this institute was formed. So it was not done by a political party, it was done by institutes that existed then - the Ministry of Education, the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji, Fiji National University and USP. These were the bodies that worked around this to develop industry standards because we used to have a plethora, a huge number of different sets of qualifications run by different institutes in this country, and there was a thought for a need to have a common set of standards based on the industry requirements. That is where the Fiji Qualifications Framework came up, it came up with sets of standards, national certificates based on the industry needs as defined by those industries.

Having a common qualifications framework ensures that all the training providers in this country are providing sets of qualifications through the same standards. When you have that, you can have portability of qualifications. A Certificate II from one institute is recognised from another institute. When you have that portability, you remove the need for duplication of industry standards, and I am really glad to see that this has really progressed to this extent.

Now, we have the Fiji Higher Education Commission that also has a very strong role to play in terms of looking at the money that is given out, not only look at the quality of the higher education or the institutes but I think they are also involved (if I am not mistaken) in the grants that are paid out to the various tertiary institutes in Fiji.

The other issue that I thought I would like to congratulate the Commission for is that, while it seeks all the higher education institutes in Fiji to meet basic standards of quality, they themselves have been able to get the quality accreditation from the Asia-Pacific Quality Accreditation Union. I think that is something that we have always wanted, we always want our institutes and also our regulatory bodies that are regulating these institutes to be able to demonstrate that they meet the needs that are being established by parties offshore.

I noticed also with interest their focus on the Workforce Development Strategy. I think this is very important because of one of things we continually talk about is that, we are producing a lot graduates but the employers say over and over again that the abilities of these graduates, their competencies sometimes are not matching to what the industry actually needs. There is a mismatch. So I am seeing that the development of this Workforce Development Strategy is a very important step that is being undertaken to match the outputs of these institutes to what the industries really need.

Looking at the description that they have here of this workforce framework, it says: “A workforce framework in partnership with other key stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the supply from the tertiary institutions to meet the market demands.” That is to make sure that what is coming out of the institutes is matching market demands. I think if there is one area that the Higher Education Commission needs to look at strengthening is to get a firmer grip on what the market demands are because there is a strong focus on what the supply is, we need to try to have a stronger process to try to predict the kind of demand that we need.

Industries are changing now. Whatever you learnt through a Degree, five years later, half of that information becomes obsolete. So obviously one of the things that we need to do, we need to have people coming out of institutes knowing that the knowledge that they have, 50 percent of it will be obsolete in five years. So you need to develop a kind of a workforce that is flexible, nimble and has the ability to remake itself. As technology changes, the way that we carry out work changes in the world, as industries die and new industries come up, the workforce that we have in Fiji must be nimble, and must be able to adapt.

I think this is going to be key requirement of a new kind of workforce that we will need in Fiji to make sure that Fiji maintains its competitiveness and the role of the Fiji Higher Education Commission becomes every important because it also decides how money goes to the various education institutes in Fiji.

So I think that is going to be a key role for us to play, looking down the next five years, the next 10 years, we need to get a firmer grip on the demand side of the equation and make sure that what we are producing from the institutes matches the perceived demand that will be taking place in Fiji over the next decade or so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to provide the legal clarification about what the Honourable Bulanauca had said about the formation of the Fiji Higher Education, so it has already been provided by Honourable Usamate.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Again, just listening to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, who had just got up to talk about the importance of this Higher Education Commission, it takes me back to the time when the Honourable Minister headed the TPAF and how as a Nasinu boy himself, knows that TPAF was a lot more cost effective at the time, when it would cater and help young people in poverty to be able to get a Trade Certificate, and it was much cheaper. I myself sent a few in the Nasinu area where a course was really \$150 to \$300, and it catered not only for the demands of the market but also the need to look after our young people and those who were in poverty who could afford Trade Certificates.

I just wonder if the Honourable Minister will consider to just, if he started it in 2008 and TPAF started in 2010, then why not consider to get it accredited with the Higher Education Commission, instead he sold out the very purpose of TPAF and went over and took it to FNU which then it became more expensive for our people in poverty and the majority of our people to pay for these courses.

Yes, we have the Fiji Higher Education Commission there, but its purpose is not just to accredit but we got to look at the big picture here. Are we catering for our young people who, even if they do not qualify for TELS, if they do not make it to higher educational institutions like USP and FNU, they can go to institutions like TPAF that used to be cost effective? But now it costs more, they cost more now for them to go to FNU to get that Certificate or Degree, whatever it is, we got to think about those things.

I am just challenging the Honourable Minister just like I do, remember where we came from and what we stood for and what we fought for, that is, majority of our people living in poverty to be able to afford these kinds of Certificates and Degrees that they are touting through the Fiji Higher Education Commission and the tertiary level, especially for those who cannot afford TELS, cannot guarantee an income to pay back the loan, parents are farmers or live at home, it is difficult for them.

Let us look at the bigger picture about our institutions and to make them a lot more affordable again like TPAF, it used to be a flagship institution that the Honourable Minister ran and I was very proud that he championed that. Again, I do commend this Report but if the Government would consider whatever I have mentioned. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lynda Tabuya. You have the floor Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise to give a short contribution and my contribution will be to respond to some of the things that has come from the other side of the House. They seem to not appreciate the achievement of the Governments of the past and the foundation that had been laid by those Governments which has enabled the development and also the evolution of our education sector, and that is something that constantly comes from the other side of the House. They do not appreciate the building blocks that were laid as the foundation of building up the nation, by previous Governments.

If you look back at the various Strategic Development Plans by the SVT Government, SDL Government, you will recall it all came to interconnect and how the Bainimarama-led Government

came to use some of those and how they have developed, now into their National Development Plan. We need to appreciate all that and we should not fight for who takes credit for what because no government has the answer for everything. They will one day be that side, they will be gone from that side of the House in 20 years' time, another one will come and say, "Previous governments did not do this", and we will be called "previous governments" at that time.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is the culture that is now being cultivated by the FijiFirst Government, the "we the first", the culture of "no one had done it before, unprecedented", all those words. I think, Sir, this is very important because once you start to believe that you are the only perfect government, you will not allow other opposing views that could help you in doing things. That is a very important part and I hope the Honourable Attorney-General, also for the Honourable Minister for Education and her predecessor, will also come to appreciate that.

When the Honourable Leawere was speaking, the Honourable Attorney-General was interjecting saying, "do not be caught up in the past" but every time he stands up, he goes back to 1987, he goes back that far, he is also in the past. Many, many times, Sir, he has taken this House to the past. Think of the future! Come to the future, do not go to the past, the past will kill you! Come to the present and we can work together!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Sir, this is very important and now we have reached a stage where we have a Higher Education Commission that was established in 2011. We thank the Bainimarama-led Government and also the developments that have come after that, but there are teething problems and I agree with the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure. He was head of TPAF, he understands this in the days of FNTC, et cetera, and how we are to tailor-made our education system to meet industrial needs because those who will graduate from our education institutions are to be relevant and to be on par with the current model of machines and the current technologies that are coming through into our country.

We do not want to put in people who are graduates from our universities who are obsolete; those who will not be able to operate in the modern industry that the FijiFirst Government is trying to create - a modern Fiji. But again, we have to appreciate the building blocks of the past and also work together and some of the views that have come from this side are very valid and should be taken into account.

I note the Committee's Report and also commend the Report. A very important point that was raised by the Honourable Bulanauca is the proper screening of any would-be educational provider that comes in to be registered by the Fiji Higher Education Commission to provide education. I think that is a very important role that they play, they screen and see the words that they use, we should not be getting rogue educational providers.

That is the very important thing that they should check and see that our citizens are not affected, that they give the best education for our citizens, they become relevant to the society we are in today, meeting international standards and best practices, they are competency-based as what the Honourable Minister said, to fit into the industry and also to become empowered Fijians who are able to participate and carry the baton forward after we leave.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

I rise to contribute to the motion to acknowledge the Report by the esteemed Parliamentary Standing Committee. One of the things that I noted in the discussion so far is that, our role is to be able to note the Report, but we have been hearing so many things being discussed.

So, just some of the things that came to fore that I would like to share with us which I believe is important to note, is that, first of all, the Fiji Higher Education Commission provides the framework, and education goes through a process of evolution. It is not stagnant, it keeps on changing.

Some of the most ancient universities of the world started off as theological colleges, they taught theology. But they have changed over the years as the needs have changed, as science has come upon, and also they have gone from an apprenticeship-type training to an academic training. And that is what we have to understand is being happening in our nation, and we have been moving with that modern educational growth.

The other thing is, this is a Fiji Higher Education Commission Report. It is not a secondary school report, nor a primary school report. That is dealt on a separate discussion and, therefore, I wish to just remind us that, that is part of the discussions that we are having today.

Honourable Speaker, the fees also are set by the educational institution after much thought and it is that thought and the process around it that, as an institution of this august House, we must be able to trust those who are empowered to be able to make that decision.

So, Honourable Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity just to be able to contribute to this motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and may I just draw our attention back to the findings or the recommendations and the constraints highlighted in the Report. One is budget or financial constraints, the absence of a central database or the need to have a central database, and the high turnover of staff.

Honourable Speaker, this is a very specialised area of work and one that demands technical kind of educational background to be able to undertake their work. This is a very important institution and I agree with what the Honourable Minister Usamate had highlighted. But the fact of the matter still remains, if these constraints are not addressed, then the Commission will be just like a toothless tiger, it will not be able to carry its functions.

So, as we are now coming towards the Budget session, I would implore on the Honourable Minister for Economy that the resources that the Commission is highlighting as their need, indeed, be considered favourably in this upcoming Budget session. Otherwise, Honourable Speaker, as I had highlighted, whatever the importance of this institution as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Education and Honourable Minister Usamate, will not eventuate if needed resources are not given to

the Commission to be able to perform their work for the benefit of our tertiary institutions, especially our children who are the recipients of this standard education.

Now and again we heard from the other side of the House that education holds the key to our future. If, indeed, they mean every word of that, then give the resources to be able to address the constraints as highlighted by the Higher Education Commission. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to clarify a few things right. Thank you for allowing me to speak, I had earlier withdrawn.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Second time?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, no, I had withdrawn earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot dates are being bandied around, I just refer all Honourable Members of Parliament to Page 2 of the Report, you will see in the second paragraph it says: “The Higher Education Act came into force in 2008”, not 2010, not 2004 nor 2006, it came into effect in 2008 under the Bainimarama-led Government. Of course, it continued thereafter.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, I am just giving a reference because everyone was claiming different dates.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- So?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, there is no so, just factually telling you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member who just spoke prior to me said that we need to give it enough resources. They started off with a \$1.3 million budget. In 2018, the Higher Education Commission actually has had its budget doubled, in fact, more than double, to get it to \$2.8 million. So, we are giving it enough resources and, indeed, if it requires more resources, they will be given those resources.

Yes, there was a high turnaround of staff from the Commission much earlier on. You do not have that problem now and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, generally in Fiji we see there is a huge level of poaching that is taking place between different agencies, different Departments, Ministries, Commissions, multilateral agencies, because there is a scarcity of lot of good people. Everyone wants the best people. As I mentioned earlier on, for example, a number of staff are being poached from different areas.

We ourselves are doing that. For example, the Head of Procurement in the Ministry of Economy now, is someone who has come from the British American Tobacco. So, now we are seeing a lot of movement between the private sector and the public sector too. And with the level of resourcing, of course, we see the Higher Education Commission is getting a lot better people with salary increments too.

The New Zealand Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently is working in partnership with the Higher Education Commission because they believe that strengthening it, they have had a couple of attachments from people from New Zealand to build the capacity in that, they are helping the Higher

Education Commission to develop some further, nuance rules around how they should assess different universities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Lynda Tabuya also mentioned about NTPC. It is actually still in existence under the umbrella of FNU, it is still there. It is still providing those courses to employees. Employers are able to send their staff to them and also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those courses are available.

The other point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that technical colleges are also providing courses in terms of carpentry, joinery, those kinds of skills for people who may not have any other qualification whatsoever and when they do go to those technical colleges, they do not have to pay for it because TELS actually pays it for them upfront. So, that is them not having to fork out any single cent or dollar for that matter.

The other point I also wanted to highlight because she did make a bit of a song and dance about the absence of it, when in fact there is no absence of it, I also highlighted earlier on this morning about the Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET). TVET is also under FNU and I want to reiterate this point, that TVET does actually go out to the outer islands, deep rural areas where they do provide face to face courses where the actual course conveners actually stay in the community for a few weeks, provide various basic training courses with the level of certification, which actually ensures that the level of employability increases quite significantly. Again, that is one area that we are focusing on.

The Honourable Minister for Education yesterday highlighted the fact about the technical colleges being immersed or subsumed by FNU. The Honourable Leawere made a bit of mockery of it, but it is actually a very serious matter and this goes to show that we are constantly trying to get the right and best model. It is not like one can always come up with the most perfect plan.

The reality is that, you have to the political and the administrative will to start it off in the first place, and we will always be stagnant if we do not want to constantly change it to be able to suit the climate in which we revolve in, and the Education Sector, of course, is very quickly evolving.

It is not just the Education Sector, Mr. Speaker Sir, but the employment market, as Honourable Usamate highlighted, is changing quite significantly. The demand for particular skillsets that were not even there about five years ago is now suddenly very marked and the demand for certain skillsets have now decreased, so we have to be able to have the level of flexibility to be able to respond to that. Again, the technical colleges being part of FNU, similar to what I had highlighted earlier on yesterday, is similar to what USP has already done, in terms of their Pacific TAFE.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Higher Education Commission, of course, plays a very important role, and they have got some good Board Members now also and it is being head by a female Chair, and we have got some good people in the Higher Education Commission and through the Budget process, of course, and through the Ministry of Education, we will continue to ensure that they get funded and resourced appropriately. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General.

Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, I promise to be short. Honourable Speaker, I would like to echo the sentiments aired by the Honourable Mikaele Leawere, in acknowledging the work of the former Head of the Fiji Higher Education Commission, Dr. Richard Wah, who passed away some time ago.

Dr. Richard Wah, Honourable Speaker, was a very strong advocate of two things; the special character of religious-based education and the protection of our children who come from impoverished aspects of our society and factoring this into trying to develop the best education system that Fiji needs. I believe he very much supported the issue of the technical colleges which is now part of the area that the Education Commission is looking at.

So I think I would just like to pay tribute to that, and that I understand as well that if he were here, he would definitely support the Fiji Higher Education Commission and its work and that the available resources should be put to it to allow it to do its work properly, and at the same time, the Education Commission to be mindful of the special character or special attributes of our children in Fiji today in Higher Education or in terms of the way that they are going face their life in the future. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, you have the floor.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, just a very short contribution. The Fiji High Education Commission plays an important part in correlating the economic and educational affiliation, enforcing sustainable national economic growth. The Commission supplements research of employment trends and jobs scopes for Fijian job seekers.

I also wish to bring to light to this august House that yesterday, the inaugural National Job Fair was launched which was conceptualised by the Ministry for Employment, Fiji High Education Commission and other stakeholders. I applaud the Commission and the respected Ministry for taking such a worthy stance in building our nation and empowering, not only youth but all Fijian job seekers.

The Commission has taken a steadfast approach in implementing and administering the Fiji Qualification Framework which has enabled the international and local measure of qualifications obtained in Fiji, thus strengthening our graduates and consequently placing them better with competitors.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I also wish to express my support to the recommendations made by the Committee on the Fiji High Education Commission FHEC, being the parent that establishes and controls a central database for the harbouring of statistics from all higher education providers in the country as data is a pivotal element in developing strategies and framework.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I commend the Commission for its performance and its growth since its inception and I hope and wish the Fiji High Education Commission all the best in its future endeavours. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, you have the floor and the right of reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to commend the work of the Commission and also I am happy to note that the challenges faced by the Higher Education Commission then in 2015 has been addressed because of the increase budgetary allocation by the Government. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Chairperson. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the Motion?

(Chorus of ‘Noes’)

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O’Connor, to move the motion.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI CORRECTIONS SERVICE -
1ST JANUARY – 31ST JULY 2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. A.D. O’CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Committee on the Corrections Service - 1st January to 31st July, 2016 Annual Report, which was tabled on 16th May, 2018.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak on the motion. You have the floor.

HON. A.D. O’CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; on behalf the Honourable Members of the Committee, I take this opportunity to speak in support of the motion in regards to the debate on the above Committee Report, tabled previously by the former Chairperson, Lt. Col. (Retired) Netani Rika before the House.

The gist of the Report is about reforms in the Fiji Corrections Service (FCS) over a six months period in 2016, to capture the paradigm shift from punitive confinement to a more modern approach of rehabilitation, through the implementation of various programmes to help them obtain skills and knowledge to facilitate their re-integration into society upon release, for example, the Trade and Manufacturing Account Programmes that help in progressing the above skills and discipline.

Under Fiji’s National Development Plan 2017-2021 focus, the Government will continue its efforts to further improve access to justice and better rehabilitation of inmates under the care of FCS.

The United Nation’s SDG No. 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions, sets the platform for member countries to adhere in terms of benchmarking to the best international practices. The Committee noted that FCS has made inroads to address the SDGs namely:

1. SDG No. 1 – No poverty. The FCS has put in place rehabilitation programmes for inmates with the intention of instilling entrepreneurial skills to make them self-sufficient. Rehabilitation programmes, such as vegetable farming, crops, aquaculture, art gallery, piggery, poultry, joinery, bakery and garment.
2. SDG No. 2 – End hunger. The FCS aims to achieve food security and improved nutrition through the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

3. SDG No. 5 – Gender equality. The FCS is an equal opportunity employer and currently within the Service, there are a good number of senior women officers who are placed with senior appointments in the organisation to make a difference.

In the local Fiji context, all Honourable Members in this august House and all Fijians have a common responsibility in the respect, acceptance, forgiveness and holistic rehabilitation of our sons and daughters under the care of FCS. Unlocking the second prison upon the release of the sons and daughters of Fiji through acceptance into our homes and society, is critical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is anticipated that the recommendations made by the Committee is given due consideration by Government and addressed through appropriately.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few comments, as a Member, I support the recommendations of the Report before the House, and I thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson. Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate.

Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to contribute to this motion. The Report is a Bi-Annual Report for the period 1st January, 2016 to 31st July, 2016, and this Report came to Parliament about two years after the auditing in May last year. Certainly, a lot of things have changed.

An Annual Report is very critical and important and I feel that this House should take note of that. This is the mechanism where the CEOs or Heads of Ministries and Departments account to Parliament for the resources that was allocated to them yearly, to operate and run their Ministries, and it is critical that this Report come in a timely way to this august body for us to be able to know how the CEOs and Heads of Departments have utilised the resources that were allocated to them.

What I have noted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the working of the Committee that I am a Member of, that these Reports that are coming to the Committees have been outdated - two years and sometimes three years. I think it does not give us, Parliamentarians, the scrutiny that we should be giving in a timely way.

This Report is an example of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Reports should be submitted in a timely way to Ministers by the CEOs so that the Ministers understand and know what their CEOs are doing about the resources that the Government gave them. It is the responsibility of the CEO and the Minister to bring those Reports to this House so that we can also know how the Ministries and Departments are operating and how are they using the resources given to them.

On the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the Corrections Service Act 2006 has been recommended. This Report, as I said, is the 2016 Report and has lapsed from the time and I assume that there has been progress in that particular recommendation.

I think it is most critical and important for the Honourable Attorney-General to look into the required review that is incorporated in the Report. As I read the Report, the recommendation for review was more in terms of recognising the Corrections Service as a Discipline Force. I think it is not at the moment. The Head of the Corrections Service feels that it should be addressed at this time and I hope that that should be addressed in a timely way.

There has been a lot of work done by the Fiji Corrections Service and I should thank them for

what has been done. We have moved away from punitive approach to rehabilitation approach and I think that is the right way to go, where the prisoners come out of prisons, they have skills that they be able to utilise to earn a living and to be able to support themselves and their families.

From what I gather in reading the Report, there are six Business Units and they have contributed a lot in terms of the revenue contributed to the Trading and Manufacturing Account of the Fiji Corrections Service. And I noted that in 2015, an amount of \$103,384.56 was contributed from those Business Units to the Trading and Manufacturing Account of that particular Department.

In 2016, that changed significantly where a sum of \$358,160.23 was realised and I think we need to commend those involved. There is a reasoning mentioned in the Report as to why there has been a difference in the amount realised in 2015 and that realised in 2016. They pointed to issue of honesty. I think there were people who were managing and running the affairs of these Business Units in the past, who were not very honest with their work. Later in 2016, the Report realises that more people who are dealing with the funds are more accountable and honest with their work.

The ‘Nelson Mandela Rules’ is also an issue that the Fiji Corrections Service should look into. Some actions have been taken, as I see from the Report, but we needed to do more in terms of fully complying with the Mandela Rule. It is an obligation. I think Fiji has ratified the ‘Nelson Mandela Rules’ and it is for us to see that those things are implemented in a timely way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Anare Jale. You have the floor, Honourable Member.

HON. RATU T.N. NIUMATAIWALU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. Thank you for allowing me to make a short contribution on the Review Report of the Fiji Correctional Services 2016 Annual Report.

At the outset of my contribution, Mr. Speaker Sir, I wish to make it clear that I have a number of reservations regarding the manner in which the Report is done and presented before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, examining a statutory institution’s Annual Report is not supposed to be limited to its finances, but the overall scope of activities with the view of improving services to the people and making governance effective. This is exactly what the thrust of my contribution is, starting with a question, does this Report live up to the challenge? May I answer, it does not. Let me tell you why.

1. This Report is a product of selective consultation because the Committee only consulted with the Fiji Corrections Service and no other stakeholders, such as NGOs, inmates, former inmates and families and former prison officers.
2. The Report fails to be inquisitive about the prison and the Corrections Services with regard to the leadership of the Commissioner of Prison and the work atmosphere he has created which is that of fear.
3. The failure to advise on the appointment of the Parole Board and policing his own officers and counsellors.
4. The Report fails short of addressing the workers’ rights as Corrections Service officials continue to suffer in silence.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Committee could and should have explored means and ways of recommending better working conditions for the officials, beginning with the commencing pay at the military level.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I thought it prudent to speak on this pressing and relevant matters to the Fiji Corrections Service because this Report or for that matter the Report of any statutory body should be considered in isolation. This is one concept but not only this Report but many of the Reports that come for scrutiny before the Committees in this House, is either aimed at avoiding public probity or adopting half-baked reports.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the existence of this kind of atmosphere in the Fiji Corrections Service is detrimental to the spirit of corrective and alternative justice system, fails to rehabilitate inmates, denigrates Corrections Service to inhumane levels, eliminates important stakeholders and paves the way for everything opposite to the ideology of Corrections Service.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, those are some of the observations that I want to make from the Report and having done so, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to make a humble plea to the other side of the House and especially to the Honourable Minister responsible, to take remedial actions to address the issues that have been and will be highlighted in the course of this debate. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I thank the Honourable Ratu Tevita Niumataiwalu for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I would like to just agree on the sentiments of the Honourable Tui Namuka, Honourable Ratu Niumataiwalu, about the comments that he has made. I do want to acknowledge and commend the Government on the building of the New Remand Centre, and especially the Detention Centre for boys.

As we saw the other day, we had a visit from the Juvenile Centre and it was a concern in the past where the offenders and the victims were housed together.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, boys.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- No, in the Juvenile Centre. Both, the offenders and the high-risk boys were housed together in the old days, and the Director of Social Welfare Department can confirm that, however, I am commending the Government for ensuring that this was addressed. With the building of the new Remand Centre and certainly the Juvenile Centre, it has taken care of that, so I am commending him.

Honourable Speaker, I just want to state a concern that the remand prisoners and those who are serving, the difficulty that they face at the moment which is a new rule that has been put in place and the Honourable Bulitavu is aware of this, that it is now the requirement for lawyers or for those who represent remand prisoners and serving prisoners, that they now have to write a letter to the Commissioner before they can visit their clients in Prison.

This is a new policy and it has become quite a difficult one for the access to justice for our remand prisoners and serving prisoners to be able to access their lawyers. It is another red tape that is put in place, which has made it difficult for our prisoners and remand prisoners to access justice. We would like to ask the Government through the Commissioner, to remove this requirement which has always been the practice in the past when a remand prisoner is sent to prison or someone that is sentenced to prison, that they can access their lawyers right away.

They can be visited and they can seek further legal advice, so that is the only issue I would like to raise and ask the Government to consider removing that requirement, to make it easier for our inmates to access to justice. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Honourable Anare Jale in respect of the Reports and the timing at which we are looking at. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that there is a lot of legacy issues, a lot of the Annual Reports are outstanding, so you have to catch up. But, of course, the Committees did not give their reports on time and I am glad that we are debating a lot of these reports now, the content of it, so we can actually catch up with the current reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to highlight, this was discussed also yesterday that the Corrections Service needs to have a different approach and I reiterate this point that we, perhaps need to move and I strongly recommend that these reports from the Corrections Service in order for us to have that mind change, should not go to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. It should actually go to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. If we are going to take the philosophical approach that Corrections Service is all about correcting and rehabilitating people, we, perhaps as a Parliament, need to agree on that so we can move these reports to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are obviously a number of advancements being made and I do not want to, sort of, reiterate all of them again, but one point that I would like to make is in respect of internationally acceptable trainings. Now, the Prison Officers or Corrections Officers, I should say, are getting training in four specific areas.

One, of course, is the Training on the Bangkok Rules, which is the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women which is very important, and our adherence to that has led also to the fact that we have now built a new (some may argue) and separate state-of-the-art women's prison in Natabua. Let me reiterate this point again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before we had only one women's prison which is here in Korovou. If any female gets convicted and sentenced and had to travel from any other part of Fiji to Korovou, which meant that their support bases or family, et cetera, would not be there in particular, if they were breastfeeding, and all those sorts of issues. If they have young children and lack of visitation, of course, can have a huge psychological impact on the people who are incarcerated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other area of training that we have got is through the Tokyo Rules which deals with the UN Standards on Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures. Honourable Tabuya talked about remand prisoners versus those who are actually in custody for substantive sentences. Of course, we need to treat them differently because they are, of course, innocent until proven guilty, but some people cannot be released on bail because of the particular offence they have been charged with or perhaps, given the track record. So these are the rules pertaining to that; the Correction Officers are getting training in that.

The third and final one is the training in the Mandela Rules which everyone talks about. This is very important for the Correction Officers to actually understand how these rules actually operate, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

A point of clarification is, the Juvenile Centre is actually managed through the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, not through the Corrections Service. They are separate altogether, and I am sure the Honourable Minister can make comments in respect to that.

We have recently seen and as was also highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there has been an issue of contrabands. One of the reports that we discussed the last time was in respect of the contraband and the Committee had recommended hand-held scanners, permanent scanners because we had a lot of contraband coming through.

We have also seen that sometimes those who come under the guise of visiting remand prisoners or perhaps, even other prisoners, in fact, they do bring in contraband. So there has been a need to try and mitigate these risks and perhaps, this is why you have those requirements. But I think they can be processed quite quickly, they do not actually have to be physical letters, they also can be through email in everyone's phones and we can do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also let me remind Parliament that we also have the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. Any complaints of those in custody, they can deal with it, they have access to the Corrections Services and, of course, the Commissioner of Corrections Services also allows access to the Human Rights Commission and their staff to be able to sort out any matters that may be raised.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the Committee for that.

I would like to also provide a clarification. I made a wrong statement earlier on when I said that the CEO of FCCC went to Votualevu College, in fact, he went to Nadi Sangam, and I just want to correct that for the record. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

First, I would like to thank the Committee on the Review Report before the House and in particular, in the way they have linked up the submissions that were made to them to the SDGs and in particular, SDG 1, SDG 2 and, of course, SDG 5.

I also would like to commend the Fiji Corrections Service for mapping out their efforts in relation to the welfare of prisoners to UN Standard Minimum Rules of Nelson Mandela on the treatment of prisoners, the Tokyo Rules and also the Bangkok Rules for the treatment of women prisoners and custodial measures for women offenders.

It should be noted also is the efforts taken by the Fiji Corrections Service in successful performances in small business units, empowering prisoners to be self-sufficient with livelihood skills, preparing them basically for the outside world.

It is very encouraging to note that the Fiji Corrections Service is well-versed with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) obligations and we should also note and it is encouraging to see that the data showed in this particular Report, that

there is a reduction of about 40 percent in the number of women offenders in 2016 when compared to 2015 data. It was 89 in 2015 to 48 in 2016.

Also note that the ongoing training of prison officers for the paradigm shift from a punitive role to one of rehabilitation which is something that as a Ministry, we also use as a platform for the juvenile offenders that come under the care of the Director of Social Welfare.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to commend and thank both, the Committee and the Fiji Corrections Service for the excellent work that they have done in relation to this particular year. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa. I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you very much, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, I would like to also add my words of commendation to the Committee and also to those who participated in contributions that ended up with their report. I was going to commend and I commend the Honourable Attorney-General for his support for the views expressed by Honourable Anare Jale on the nature of Corrections Service from a Social Service Department, and not a Disciplined Force. The emphasis should continue to be on correctional and rehabilitation rather than punitive isolation or incarceration.

On the correctional and rehabilitation aspect, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I believe we need correctional rehabilitation efforts on both sides of the prison walls. Those of our relatives who are inside and also for us, the society as a whole.

There has been a commendable programme, the Yellow Ribbon. Those of us, not in those institutions, our ability to embrace them and integrate with them goes a long way into making sure that they do not reoffend when we take them into our families and our villages, and try and consider them as ordinary members of our society. So I believe that the training on rehabilitation should be conducted on both sides, particularly the relatives and the leaders of societies who will have to take back or embrace those who have come out of the Corrections Service.

Post-Traumatic Stress treatment or assessment, I believe there is a real need for that and for both also, those who were coming out and those of us on the outside of the law.

I would like to commend the Commissioner of Corrections Service. He and I go to the same communion congregation in Butt Street at 8 o'clock on Sunday mornings. I believe, Sir, that the Commissioner, a subordinate officer of mine and the Honourable Prime Minister during our times in the Military is caring a lot of weight, not physical but psychological.

He probably feels that he had been branded with his charges by those of us who are not inside those Corrections Service. That is why I believe that the rehabilitation and the post-trauma stress treatment and effort should be conducted for both serving, and their wardens.

I commend the Corrections Service for their training in joinery, poultry farming, vegetables farming, et cetera. I have an order there which they have not started working on. I am providing the fuel for a trip in Pacific Harbour. I have seen some of the work they have done, they have been very professional and cheap. I will confirm my orders and hope to have them delivered before the Annual Meeting of the Wesley Division in two months' time.

I noted what the Honourable Tabuya said about offenders in remand, and I do not know both, she and the Honourable Attorney-General know the difference between the use of the word of the "offender". Are you an offender before or were you convicted? But then there are some of those who are kept overnight or some time in custody and we are told they are there for protective custody to protect them from victims outside and also to protect the society from them.

I once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, commend the Committee and hope that the recommendations we have noted from the Report will be acted upon, and I support the motion before the House. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I have a very short contribution. I agree with the motion and also commend the Committee's work on the Report and the necessary recommendations that have been listed to advance this particular institution. But the real issue here is to shift the paradigm from punitive system to rehabilitative justice.

I think their efforts are really done but I agree with the Honourable Attorney-General in terms of the Fiji Corrections Service, to conduct basic workshops in terms of officers understanding the *iTaukei* rules, Bangkok Rules, the Mandela Rules, as this is very important because it will increase their knowledge on how those rules are to be applied in situations that they will be involved in. I will take an example, in the Mandela Rule - Rule 61, in terms of searches to be conducted in the cell.

There are also in the Mandela Rules where you do body cavity searches. How this is conducted and the rules that need to be complied with on the presence of some medical officers, et cetera. These are some of the things that need to be trained by the officers and be empowered to understand on how these rules apply in practice as part of their duty.

Given that some of the searches done are done with harassment, with other ill treatment causing injury, and I have witnessed inmates getting a brunt of what we call Emergency Combat Unit Search from Naboro, and how in the morning these inmates come to me with bandages, swollen eyes, how they were treated in the ordeal of the search, but again, they cannot open up their mouth. They cannot complain and they do not get immediate medical attention. So it comes down to how we train those officers to understand the rules on how to play their role, given that those officers also suffer psychologically and sometimes, the use of reasonable and excessive force cannot be differentiated.

The other thing point that was raised by the Honourable Attorney-General is in terms of contraband. Contraband is a breach in any correctional services facility but again, the introduction of CCTV cameras, scanner machines and detectors, cannot solve the problem. Contrabands come into prison with mobile phones, those prohibited items (cigarettes, drugs, et cetera) come through, passing through the system, the solution does not lie with the technology we bring in because most of those cases are done through collusion, where inmates and officers collude to bring illegal stuff into the prison facilities. That is why officers need to understand the Mandela Rules, Tokyo Rules, Bangkok Rules, so that they themselves be law-abiding.

The system that operates inside prison where a Corrections Officer might be participating or colluding with the inmates on how trafficking items from outside get inside, do sometimes receive

payments from the proceeds of that crime somewhere because he/she is the one outside, so the supplier will be somewhere outside wherever this particular item will be dropped off for pickup.

Those are some of the things. When you come into the prison walls, you will see a totally different world, different system that operates inside, it beats the whole system. I have the opportunity to serve with political prisoners too. Before I went in, the former Brigadier Driti was also serving his last few days there. other political prisoners.

When we look at the exchange of knowledge, those educated inmates, you get to see how advanced those criminals have become, sharing ideas and also how they communicate. There is a real need for a revamping of the whole system if we are really to provide the best environment or atmosphere, where corrections need to take place and when they come out, they do not reoffend.

On the issue of recidivism, when you have recidivism, it means that the rehabilitation process has failed. Somewhere along the line, something went wrong and that particular rehabilitated inmate reoffend, and that is always the case because sometimes ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is not always the case, Honourable Member.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It is always the case, you do not understand ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- But I understand more than you

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- We have been there done that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Those are some of the things, Honourable Speaker, Sir,

I agree with the Honourable Attorney-General that most of the officers really need to go to workshops and also further training to increase their knowledge on how to deal with inmates and the various things that they had gone through.

The other thing I came to face in prison is the system of visitation. According to the Mandela Rules, you have a set of people who can visit you but in the current practice now, we have a pro-forma system that any inmate who comes in, you have to list down three persons who are only your relatives who can come and visit you. This affects some inmates who come from Vanua Levu and transferred to Suva, some of their relatives in Suva want to go and visit them but they are turned away at the gate because their names do not appear on the pro forma.

There needs to be flexibility in practice on how these rules are applied and also as the Honourable Tabuya had mentioned, in terms of legal access - legal visitation by lawyers and legal aid to their clients, I think there needs to be a system that will allow inmates not to miss out on the various legal advices that they need in their particular appeal in court cases.

In the previous Bill when we talked about the increase number of Judges, some of the inmates as I alluded to in my contribution they are well-informed with the law. Also, many of them have done submissions in person that have set aside and quashed the conviction and ruling of many sitting High Court Judges, and many life convictions have been quashed from submissions the Judges' Ruling has been set aside from submissions written by inmates. That shows the knowledge that they have and also the things that they can contribute to if they come out.

I thank the Honourable Attorney-General that the Mercy Commission has sat and we also publicly know now the members of the Commission. I do not know why there was much secret in revealing their names and given that it was raised here, their names have come out. However, just to urge the Mercy Commission Secretariat to conduct awareness into various prison facilities so that inmates can understand the real process.

There is a different process set by the Mercy Commission, provide clear rules and procedures on how the petitioners will have to apply, and given the different rules or practice by the Commissioner in the Fiji Corrections Service. If the Mercy Commission Secretariat can provide awareness to all the Corrections facilities on who is eligible and what needs to be accompanying their petition, their court ruling, plus other justification on what they need to prove in their various applications. That is a need that the Secretariat needs to move around that will ease the whole process and it will take away the feeling of being left behind by many of those inmates.

Again, Sir, I commend the Report before the House and *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Mosese Bilitavu.

I give the floor to the Chairperson for your right of reply.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for your information, the absence of Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu this afternoon, he has excused himself because he is unwell, we wish him a speedy recovery.

Honourable Members, arrangements have been made for dinner which will be held in the Big Committee Room. We adjourn for an hour so you can have dinner but since it is on the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, do not expect to get dessert. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.50 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.51 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to move the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORT – AUDITS OF
GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS**

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Audit of Government Ministries and Departments for the Year ended 31st December, 2014 (Volume 1 to Volume 4) which was tabled on 17th May, 2018.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; I, as the Chairperson of the current Standing Committee on Public Accounts who moved the motion, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the previous Public Accounts Committee Review Report on the Audit Report for the Whole of Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st December, 2014 (Volume 1 to Volume 4), which was tabled in Parliament on 17th May, 2018.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, for information purpose, first, I would like to elaborate on the two types of audit opinion that are usually presented in the Auditor's Report which are known as Unqualified Audit Opinion and Qualified Audit Opinion.

Sir, an Unqualified Audit Opinion is also known as a clean opinion. The auditor reports an unqualified opinion if the financial statement is presumed to be free from material misstatements.

Sir, Qualified Audit Opinion is given when a company's financial records have not been presented in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Although the wording of the qualified opinion is very similar to an unqualified opinion, the Auditor provides an additional paragraph, including exclusions from the cleanliness of the financial statements and points out why the auditor's report is not unqualified.

In reference to this Public Accounts Committee Report, overall the Report had highlighted the progress of these Government Ministries and Departments. Sir, we need to remember that this is a 2014 Audit Report and as we speak, most of the issues that were identified in the Report has either been dealt with or are in the process of being addressed.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, although issues have been reduced but there are issues that still needs to be addressed and needs improvement within these line Ministries and Government Departments in moving forward, and this has been further highlighted by the Committee in their recommendation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the audit issues identified were from 2014 and it is within the 38 Ministries and Departments that were audited. It was noted that out of these, 20 Ministries and

Department were provided with an unqualified audit report, with attention drawn to some instances. A total of 18 Ministries and Departments were provided with a qualified audit report. The qualified report originated from issues ranging from unconfirmed and unreconciled general ledger account variances, accounting irregularities in account balances, non-disclosure of account balances, board of surveys either not carried out or carried out but the losses were not approved or not recorded as losses to Government and stock-take were not carried out.

Furthermore, it was evident in the Report that most of the issues identified are cross-cutting issues within Ministries and Departments which could have been dealt within the individual Ministry and Department in consultation with the Ministry of Economy and the Office of the Auditor-General.

At the outset, it is very important to note that capacity is an essential issue with accounting officers that lacks the basic fundamentals required to reconciling and maintaining of accounts back in 2014. In this regard, it is pleasing to note that all Ministries and Departments are working very hard and continuously conducting trainings and consultations with relevant stakeholders to improve on these issues that were raised by the Auditors.

Finally, I commend the effort of the previous Public Accounts Committee Members in the formulation of this Report and most importantly, for each Ministry and Department in taking on board the Committee recommendations positively to improve their capacity on the issues that were raised during the audit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few comments, as the Member moving the motion on this Public Accounts Committee Report, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

Honourable Ro T.V. Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPK.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Public Accounts Committee for this Report and I am just going to be looking at Chapter 4 in Volume 3, which is on the Ministry of Education.

Part A addressed the financial statements and this is the audit opinion, and I quote:

“That the audit of 2014 Accounts resulted in the issue of a qualified audit report.

The Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts did not complete the Annual Board of Survey for the whole Ministry. As a result, the correctness of the Statement of Losses submitted by the Ministry could not be verified.”

The Appropriation Statement, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry incurred expenditure totalling \$377.1 million in 2014, against the revised budget of \$370 million, resulting in overspending of \$7.1 million or 2 percent.

Part B to this Report, Honourable Speaker, Sir, on the over-expenditure, this was due to incorrect People-to-Post (P2P) listing used while preparing the Budget submissions and according to the Report, this indicates poor budgeting and financial management. Hopefully, and these are my notes, “The Ministry notes the Auditor-General’s recommendations which was supported by the Committee:

- (a) To manage funds wisely, proper planning and monitoring should be in place; and

(b) An accurate person-to-post listing should be used for proper budgetary planning.”

Some concerns, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I will be brief on this, was the Trust Fund Account to be properly managed and this is where good governance requires for this to be done.

On procurement officers to be monitored and supervised, as they play an important role in keeping the Ministry of Education within the Budget, in terms of proper price comparison before purchasing goods and services. And I will just look at two issues on this, Honourable Speaker, and one is on the Free Education Grant (FEG).

I think what I saw here is quite disturbing, Honourable Speaker, in that the Ministry of Education disbursed a total of \$2.474 million as FEG to 12 secondary schools under the Management of a religious organisation in 2014. This was managed and administered by the Management of the religious organisation from their headquarters in Suva.

The Audit noted that out of the total FEG given to the schools in 2014, 30 percent or \$743,800 of the total grant was loaned to a university also owned by the religious organisation, without the approval of the Ministry of Education. As at the 31st December, 2014, only 8.2 percent or \$61,000 of the total amount loaned was repaid by the university.

The Audit also noted that for some of the schools, more than 50 percent of the FEG was loaned to the university during 2014, instead of giving the funds to the schools. For example, the total FEG provided by the Ministry to a school (I will not name the school), Honourable Speaker, in 2014 was \$427,108. However, the School Management only provided the school with \$197,108 and the balance of \$230,000 or 54 percent was loaned to the university. This loan was not paid back to the school as at 31st December, 2014.

In another instance, a school (they also gave their registration number) was given a total of \$186,060 in 2014. However, the School Management loaned \$75,500 or 41 percent of the total paid to the university, and the school was only provided with \$111,060 or 59 percent of the total grant in 2014, instead of the full amount which was \$186,060. By 31st December, 2014, the loan was not paid back by the university. The Public Accounts Committee refers you to a table for more examples of the same.

On the final issue, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is on unaccounted laptops. We heard so much about this, Honourable Speaker, that one laptop would be given to a child in 2014. The audit on 5th December, 2014, carried out a physical verification of laptops purchased under this programme. These laptops were stored and distributed through the Primary Section Store Room. The physical verification of this revealed that 60 laptops worth \$27,600 went missing.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education did not have any documentation on this, and the Public Accounts Committee agreed with the Auditor-General’s Office that this should be investigated and disciplinary action taken. The laptops were not verified when received. According to the contract agreement signed between the supplier and the Ministry of Education, the authorised MOE Official or representative must inspect the 2,000 laptops.

The Audit noted that the Ministry of Education did not inspect the conditions of the 2,000 laptops supplied by the supplier. However, upon physical verification by the audit on 15th December, 2014, it was noted that 15 laptops costing \$6,900, were not in working condition and was stored in the Store Room at the Ministry Headquarters, Quality House.

The Public Accounts Committee concurred with the Auditor-General’s Office that the Ministry of Education should investigate this matter and surcharge the officers responsible. So those are the two

issues that I am highlighting from that Report on the Ministry of Education.

There are other issues but because of time constraints, I will only look at that and Ministry for Education really needs to look at the issues that are outlined in the Public Accounts Committee Report, and this is in terms of good governance issues as pointed out by the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Report.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I support the Public Accounts Committee Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, the issues raised by Honourable Kepa arose out of that Audit Report. I want to comment on the issue raised about the FEG that she has raised.

Sir, 2014 was the first year that FEG was given to schools. The Ministry, in January 2014, gave out a guideline of how the Grant should be utilised; this percentage will go to IT development, this much percentage from the Grant will go to library books purchase, this percentage will go towards physical exercise programmes, et cetera.

What happened as noted in the Report, one faith-based group that the schools were operating, had one single account. Each school did not have a separate bank account, nor have a separate manager. Instead, their headquarters had one bank account and whatever Grant that the Ministry gave went to that single bank account. From there, they determined how much each school will get. That was how that particular transaction happened.

The faith-based group decided that each school will get only this amount of money, et cetera, and they also took the money to the university that they were operating. Now, obviously, the later part of the year when we got elected, we found that out and the matter is before the court now, so I do not want to comment on that. But I want to say what we did to ensure that we rectified the problem. That was the time I was selected in September to become the Minister for Education.

What we did was, we immediately centralised for that particular faith-based group, all schools. The Ministry held the Grant and gave it directly to the school Principal or Head Teacher, for the following year, saying to the faith-based group, “You appoint separate managers of the school and there should be separate school accounts, operated by the Manager, signed by the Manager and Treasurer. They said, “All right, we will do that.” So they came back to us saying, “These two schools, this is the manager.” We said, “No. Each school must have a manager and a treasurer, they should sign it and then we will give the money out.” So I think it took them two years to finally agree to that condition.

In 2015 and 2016, then we started to release the money. In that way, we ensured that the school got the full amount and when that happened, we noted that the school’s louvre blades were missing, toilet was in a bad shape, teachers were struggling with stationeries because the management at the headquarters said, “No, you can make do with that.” The teachers were asking for whiteboard, they would say, “Blackboard was used for so long, why you need a whiteboard, et cetera?”

Immediately in 2015 when the next Grant was given, it was centralised and there was no issue then. The Ministry of Education’s Finance Section had an officer allocated to look after 10 schools. With the principal, the money was directly given to the principal or head teacher. That is how it was managed, and that was a lesson for the Ministry.

Again, the Ministry made it very clear to them that any usage of the Grant, jointly, the principal and head teacher must agree. If they want to vire money, for example, from the library account for the renovation of some building, then the principal or head teacher has to agree or say, “I do not need library books this year because I already have a stock of library books”. So in that way, we ensure that the school was not starved off their operating grant when the management wanted to, for example, to construct a hall or an additional classroom.

Effectively, it was an operating grant but the Ministry allowed that if there was any surplus, then it could be vired towards capital construction or renovation of the property. So that was how it was handled.

The other issue of one laptop per child, that was last year. I noted that that was an issue, there was no accountability of the number of laptops that was given. That was the last year that the one laptop per child was implemented, in 2014. After that year from my recollection, that was not given out to schools. That was an allocation of \$800,000 annually, we lost that money to Ministry of Economy. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to make commentaries on the Public Accounts Committee Report as a Member, and also to support the motion before the House regarding this Report.

First and foremost, Honourable Speaker, I would like to state the importance of the Public Accounts Committee in reviewing the Office of the Auditor-General’s Reports as a Parliamentary tool that provides checks and balances on how Government funds had been expended by the relevant Ministries and Departments.

Also, I would like to raise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about the time taken for this Report to finally reach this House in terms of discussions and deliberations on very important pertinent issues regarding Ministries and Departments that were allocated budgetary allocations in the period of audit. I would like to start with some of the pertinent details in terms of the findings of the Audit.

I know the recommendations are there but they are in general form. And if you could allow me to lead the House into the respective areas of concern that might help the Government to improve on their systems and processes, and also to take heed of the Auditor-General’s recommendations. Although the Report is three years too late, it still remains relevant, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

First and foremost is the conduct of the Audit Committee, Public Accounts Committee meetings. I think it is only proper that we also raise concerns that at most times when Ministries and Departments are called for meetings with the Public Accounts Committee, usually the Heads of Departments or Permanent Secretary is expected to attend. But at most times, most of the Ministries and Departments that were called, usually send in their second in command or at the Director level, especially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you note from this Report, for the Ministry of Economy, the Permanent Secretary did not attend the meetings that we had regarding the 2014 Public Accounts Committee meetings.

I think that we, as Government, should ensure that respective Government Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments should take the liberty to attend and explain in person the various audit findings in their respective Ministry.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also bring to the attention of Honourable Members that when the last Office of the Auditor-General Report was presented in the House in the February Sitting, the Ministry of Economy's Report was not included with it. So it brings to light a lot of questions as to the reason why the rest of the Ministries and Departments had already submitted their reports, without the Ministry of Economy's audit report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we still raise our concerns in terms of the allocation that has been given to Head 50 - Miscellaneous. As per the 2014 Report, the Head 50 allocation was given an amount of \$168.1 million and was divided into Operation which was allocated \$35.6 million and Capital Expenditure of \$128 million. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we saw that a lot of payments came out of Head 50 that I will allude to further, that bypassed the respective financial procedures and processes in the House.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the auditors also found out the anomalies in terms of the Mahogany Trust Funds. Payments were made from respective Ministry to Ministry without proper acquittals. Therefore, we recommended that the respective Ministry needed to properly acquit the payment regarding Mahogany Trust Funds.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the taxpayers' funds that was used in the Election expenses, as you know, 2014 was Election year, a portion of the amount was taken out from Head 50 and given to the Fiji Police Force for their purposes. Even that was not properly acquitted by the Fiji Police Force. An amount also was used at the Ministry of Economy for the sports and social club activities.

Those are some of the issues that have been highlighted for the Ministry of Economy that need to be looked at and also proper accounting processes need to be followed in terms of how the expenditures had been expended for the respective Ministry.

In terms of the Public Service Commission, the issues that have been highlighted are endless, especially the recruitment, discrimination in the recruitment, dismissal of staff without following normal grievances and disciplinary procedures and that should be the main focus of attention. However, small minor issues were picked up by the Office of the Attorney-General.

As I have alluded to earlier, 2014 was a year of the Election, therefore, Government introduced many feel good policies that were given to prepare people for Election. I note amongst the anomalies highlighted, procedures and administrative delays and oversight were also captured. Hidden among those issues, remain the ongoing concerns of racial, religious and nepotism, nepotistic favours, not to forget the political appointments and terminations, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker. But how sad and inappropriate that the Office of the Auditor-General's Report falls short of mentioning those underlying issues. As already being alluded to, Mr. Speaker, the devil is definitely in the detail.

When we look at the issues highlighted, you can read between the lines, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and victimisation is not captured in the way they should be. For the OAG and Solicitor-General's Office, from the Report, it indicated that the Legal Aid Office had not been audited. We note that their various offices had been opened around Fiji so while that is commendable, we need to ensure that their relevant budget and expenses are monitored, anything less can lead to the abuse of office. For example, the long outstanding reconciliation of trust monies.

This is a recurring issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the audit findings over the period. And it is important to note that this practice is a sure red flag that something is seriously not working. Perhaps, it will do well for Government to review its financial processes and procedures and it is time that Government reviews and gets to the bottom of the recurring issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, observations also as noted in the 2014 Report covers all Government

Ministries, but I must mention that for the last year, the Ministry of Economy has not been receiving reports, despite all other Ministries' audited reports been tabled.

On the Ministry of Education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the subsidy programmes that had been issued under the Ministry, subsidies like, free milk, free bus fares, we note that some of the bus companies are struggling in terms of their operations because they depend on cash like they used to previously and with late payment of coupons from Government, many bus companies today are regretting in terms of the e-ticketing scheme that has been introduced because it has affected their businesses.

Drivers cannot be paid and many have left because of poor remuneration. Many have taken up driving taxis or other forms of employment. That is why bus companies resort to hiring cheap labour, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Philippines. The last time I checked, I think 36 drivers have been hired in the last two years, by a bus company.

It is also important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Government should have maintained and continued with the two options, that is, to have a cash alternative, apart from the e-ticketing. Probably, this is a good time for Government to do a post-audit assessment to see whether the scheme is working and how much revenue the industry is collecting today.

One teacher transfer, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also highlighted in this Report that there are teachers working without receiving salaries for a couple of months because their contracts were not renewed. In addition to these challenges, the Ministry today faces allegations of unfair dismissals and questionable recruitments. I am told the Permanent Secretary is causing a lot of agitation in the application of Ministry's policies, as she is discriminatory and non-compromising and as a result, staff morale is at an all-time low in the Ministry. In certain instances, her judgment has come into question when she refused to re-engage teachers implicated and jailed for a few months for exercising corporal punishment.

Once the crime is paid, the trained official should know what the law requires and the skill-sets utilised. Otherwise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we question the double standards when we have senior officials of Government who commit murder get pardoned and are promoted to senior Government positions, yet such teachers who are disciplined do not get the same kindness.

This discrimination by the Permanent Secretary needs to stop, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I call upon the Honourable Prime Minister to remove her from the position as she lacks professional experience. There are better people in the professional field in the local arena. There are no shortages of local people and they can be complemented with the two Honourable Ministers for Education, who are both educators and understand the industry themselves.

The Ministry of Health, Mr. Speaker, I think there are more anomalies here than what the eyes can meet. First of all, as highlighted by the Auditor-General, the delays in installation and commissioning of operating theatre equipment, especially when the Ministry spent \$1.5 million to purchase the four new operating theatre equipment - the endoscopy, cardiac, orthopaedic and neurology operating theatres.

What we found out, Mr. Speaker, during the deliberations of the Committee that the machines were bought but the sites for installation were not ready and, therefore, the equipment were left idle in the Ministry for a period of seven months. Therefore, respective purchases that were made did not have value for money for this particular project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is important that we highlight the Ministry of Industry and Trade because it is a very critical Ministry in terms of generating employment and generating investments for the Government. The Report shows that not much growth has been recorded, which shows that the Report has been manipulated. And when they appeared before the Public Accounts Committee, they were unable to explain why issues like restricted activities have been opened for engagement by anyone wishing to invest in Fiji, never mind the loss of business opportunities for Fiji's local entrepreneurs because of the competition against foreign companies, who have money to flush in Fiji. There is nothing to be held accountable for the placing of Fiji under the tax haven listing, but it is the Ministry and Investment Fiji, not to mention RBF, for their roles in the cleaning of dirty money in Fiji through devious means.

Going back to the Ministry of Health, Mr. Speaker, there are also issues raised by the Fiji Pharmaceutical Services in terms of the delay, purchasing of medicine and similarly for the CWM Hospital, there are a lot of purchases in respect of the capital constructions that were undertaken during 2014, like the supply and installation of CAT 6 structured cabling at CWM Hospital, anomalies in contracts for supply and installation of CAT 6 structured cabling at Lautoka Hospital, MRM machines maintenance works, anomalies in the construction of quarters at Bagasau Nursing Station and anomalies in the general maintenance of South Wing at the CWM Hospital.

What was also highlighted, Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of Health is outsourcing of security services and the outsourcing of cleaning services. What was highlighted was that, all these processes did not follow the Financial Regulations.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- On another note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Ministry of Health, the anomalies in the chartering of aircraft. Even though a total amount of \$2.4 million was set for this particular service, the processes in following the tender and quotations were not followed. Even though there were three companies as was highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report, the processes of tender and quotations were not followed when undertaking these particular expenditures. These are huge amounts of public finances so they need to be properly accounted for by the respective ministries.

Similarly, Sir, for the outstanding contribution for overseas medical and consultancy services, maybe the respective Ministry, the Ministry of Health, could review their criteria that is used to determine

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Already done!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- If it is already done, can you confirm that the outstanding amount of \$185,000 has been collected?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Can you confirm?

Similarly, Sir, for Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), we need FRA to come under the audit of the Office of the Auditor-General because we need to perform a value for money audit.

On the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would be remiss of me not to mention the transactions that happened in the RFMF, especially the write-off of over \$5 million

authorised by the Ministry of Finance without proper documentation.

Similarly, there were other projects that were undertaken by the RFMF that have also raised questions, especially the Korosi to Balaga, the new Bau College site, the Daku/Vunisei project and before I take my seat, there is also a similar incident that had taken place at the Fiji Police Force, write-off of \$1.27 million undertaken in 2014, approved by Ministry of Finance but without proper documentation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is very serious in terms of the work that has to be undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee. I think the summary of the recommendation is listed on Pages 1 and 2, but we are going down into detail to make the Government aware of the seriousness of details in the Audit Findings that has been brought to the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I wish to contribute to the motion on this Report which was back in 2014 and I would like to assure the Honourable *Tau* that all that he asked in terms of the Ministry of Health have been attended to.

In terms of the repatriation of patients which is about \$2.4 million using aircraft, this is very important because a considerable amount of our population of Fijians live in outer islands and it is important to be able to go and bring them back as quickly as possible when they are very sick.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- They do not want that, they want them to die.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- As you know, because we believe in the ethos that we should not leave any Fijian behind, whether they be Lauan, Kadavuan, or Taveunian, no Fijian will be left behind, so that is why we need the aircraft.

All the repairs had been done, Honourable Speaker, to state-of-the-art in those areas that have been asked to be done, and the equipment have also been installed. One of the things to be weary of is that, there are certain contractors who are contracted to do repairs in areas in which their equipment is needed and so the delays may not necessarily be that of us as a Government, but the delays in which the contractors are able to finish a particular area which needs a particular equipment.

Those are some of the comments that I would like to share with the august House in relation to some of the things that the Honourable Member has raised in regards to this motion. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Just to the Honourable Minister for Health, we understand the need, it is just that in terms of audit, procedures and processes were not followed in engaging those aircrafts.

But, Honourable Speaker, what is glaring from the Report is the recurrence of accounting irregularities and that reflects very, very badly on the Cabinet Ministers, all of you. Bad management! They should hang their heads in shame, especially those who come within the 18 with qualified audit reports.

I feel that what we should do is to tag the salaries of these Ministers to the Audit Report so that

if they come down with a qualified report, we should deduct their salaries. And if there are too many audit queries, that should also cause a deduction. Only then, will these recurrences end and it goes over and over and all the time, all the time it is happening.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Here you read this. This is very basic. This is for Class 1 and Class 2,...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ...accounting irregularities in accounting balance, non-disclosure of account balance, board of survey either not carried out or carried but losses were not approved and those were the reasons why....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, the PS comes under you.

... and those are the reasons for a qualified report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So, Honourable Prime Minister, you have some very bad managers over that side, sack them!

(Laughter)

Yes, or change them.

Just look at the observations from the laxity in instituting disciplinary action and implementing surcharge. So, what has been happening, talking about 2014 of course, is that when their staff did not follow any procedure, they did not discipline them.

Lack of experience or technical knowledge when Ministers procure plant and equipment, including capital works. Lack of experience and technical staff on the job resulting in continuous turnover. All the time it is happening.

Specifically, I made an analysis, to give you a prize. The worst Ministry, the first prize goes to the Ministry of Health. The reason why, 50 audit queries in 2014, not the present Honourable Minister but Honourable Rosy Akbar and Honourable Jone Usamate. If you want to, I will read them out to you, just some so that you know.

One example, Refurbishment and Extension of Operating Theatre Complex at CWM Hospital. The note is, "The Ministry did not allow for any extension of time to a contractor."

Another one, Delay in Installation and Commissioning of Operating Theatre Equipment. The equipment has been left idle for seven months. It says, and I quote:

"The audit noted that because of the delay in constructing the operating theatres, the supplier only managed to install and commission equipment... (only one equipment)."

More, New Ba Hospital Project Management. The Ministry did not comply with the Income Tax Act. Do you want more?

Exterior Painting Works at Lautoka Hospital. The finding shows poor planning by the Ministry in undertaking capital projects.

Anomalies in General Maintenance of South Wing CWM Hospital. It says, and I quote:

“During a physical inspection of works completed by the Contractor in the South Wing of CWM Hospital, several instances of poor workmanship were noted.”

I can go on and on and that was during your time. But there is something that is recurring and recurring in the Ministry of Health, and that is the negligence of the Clerk of Works.

Honourable Speaker, I take these things with me all the time and read, I take them to bed and everywhere. That is why I know them and in terms of Clerk of Work’s negligence, that happened all the time, recurrence. And if you care to look at the last Auditor’s Report on the Ministry of Health, again what happened was that the Clerk of Works was awarding contracts to his father’s company, something like that, and he has been dismissed.

But that is a very bad reflection on the management by the Ministers.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes. You want to drive around in your fancy car but you are not managing your Ministry well. You should go home.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Who’s the CEO.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Do not blame the CEO, do not blame anyone else, the buck stops with the Ministers on that side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But, it is very bad.

The second prize goes to the Ministry of Education with 24 audit queries.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Oh, I lost it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, I got plenty of time. Hang on, let me look at my Volume 4, I have got Volume 4 too here.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Poor Record Keeping for Utilisation of Free Education Grant. The

audit noted that the schools did not properly maintain financial records. What kind of management is that?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Tender Not called for Contracts Exceeding \$50,000. This is the Ministry of Education on the second prize with 24 audit queries. It says, and I quote:

“The finding shows that the School did not follow proper procurement process of the Ministry when awarding contracts for school improvement works.”

The next one, Land Development for the New School Registration No. E7/2397. What was the finding here? It says, and I quote:

“The finding indicates that the Ministry does not have adequate technical expertise...”

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Unaccounted Laptops.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You spoke on it, unaccounted laptops. He spoke on this, Sir. This was raised recently.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The audit on 15/12/2014 carried out....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, this is more livelier.

(Laughter)

It says in the Report, and I quote:

“The audit on 15/12/14 carried out physical verification of the laptops purchased under the OLPC Programme. The laptops were stored and distributed through the Primary Sections Storeroom. The physical verification revealed that 60 laptops worth \$27,600 were missing.”

Lost!

It continues:

“The finding indicates poor administration of the laptops under the OLPC Programme by responsible officers. The lack of proper administration of laptops increases the risk of loss of public funds....”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You heard enough?

The third prize goes to the Ministry of Agriculture with 16 audit queries. Expired Drugs at the Veterinary Drugs Store. It says here, and I quote:

“...the audit noted the Ministry does not have in place standard operating guidelines for effective management of its veterinary drugs and disposal of expired drugs.”

Now, we are talking of building a Veterinary Hospital. You cannot even manage the drugs!

Management of Fixed Assets. It says, and I quote: “The Ministry did not conduct a Board of Survey....” It occurs year in, year out. The whole purpose of doing an audit is to ensure that it does not happen the next time, but these things are happening over and over again. That is why I am calling all those who have Audited Qualified Reports to resign or to be sacked.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Vijendra Prakash, you have the floor.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for allowing me to also contribute on the motion that is put forward for debate. I would also like to remind us that we could also go on and talk about the success from 2014 to 2019 on what the Government has done for the people of Fiji.

I will not waste my time, the Honourable Members of Opposition are talking about the accounts which was of 2014. It was an account which was during the time when Election took place and Government came over with so many things to assist this nation, and one of those things was the fee free grant to be used for all the children of this country. The way Honourable Members of the Opposition are trying to impress on this House is as if Government does not know what it is doing.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- I am speaking and you listen. I listen when you talk.

(Laughter)

I know what I have read, do not worry about that.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the improvement in the sectors that they are highlighting for all the Ministries is vast, including the accounting system, new technology that they have used and at the same time, the new management that they have changed to see that the accounts are kept in proper hands.

Whatever we have dealt with in this small time with the Public Accounts Committee, our investigation has revealed that there are improvements in every area where we have interviewed. We

have also seen that where there was a mistake done, the channel was followed to try and discipline those officers, including taking the case to court.

As far as education grants are concerned, this House should know that the Ministry of Education have made it so transparent now that if a school is unable to produce an annual audited account of previous year by 31st January

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- I am a manager of a school, you know nothing about that.

(Laughter)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- So you do not know anything about managing, please, and I am not only managing one school, I am managing four schools. Any school that is not able to give an annual audited account of previous years by 31st March is not given grant. So there is a vast improvement with the

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is wrong.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- You do not know what I am talking about. I can tell you, teachers teach some very good people, Honourable Speaker, but I fail to understand those teachers who taught very poor legal officers who do not understand anything.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, as a teacher and former teacher trainer

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order. Honourable Speaker, could you please advise him not to get personal.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, he is attacking me. Do not get personal. You talk on the issue.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Honourable Speaker, I am talking on the issue and as a teacher and former teacher trainer, we also know the product that is in the field and how they behave. We continuously assess when we know what type of product we are putting in this nation and also in the global world.

It is for the information of this House that we not only teach and being teacher trainers, Sir, we have been managing schools very successfully and we see that every single cent of taxpayers' money is accounted for. And I am so glad to say that all the schools in Fiji are nearly able to reach that proper accounting system that the Ministry needs.

Therefore, we have also seen, Honourable Speaker, that all the Ministries, including Ministry of

Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of infrastructure and Ministry of Agriculture, there are vast improvements and the success of those things also need to be told truly in this House so that we, as Members of the Public Accounts Committee, must see from one end to the other end where we have reached. This is what our responsibility is. We are here to tell the truth, we are here not to try and gain political mileage. We are to tell the right thing and we are to take this nation together in the right direction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Government, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to first acknowledge the work of the Committee and endorse the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee as it is directionally aligned to Government's public financial management improvement plan for the period 2016 to 2019. And broadly speaking, notable improvements have been made in the overall financial management and record keeping of the Ministries and Departments.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, of course, both sides of the House agree that we want an efficient Public Service and with that, it will result in the highest standard in conduct and, of course, the delivery of services. But we must also admit the fact that no Ministry is perfect, no official is perfect. You inherit what is already in the system and that is one of the unfortunate things. Whichever Government comes into power, you will have to live by what is already in existence and, of course, the big challenge is to ensure that there is improvement and efficiency in the delivery of services. That is a fact, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Audit reports are very, very critical and we totally agree. Of course, Permanent Secretaries are the Chief Accounting Officers. Every civil servant on the other side, those who had served in the Civil Service and we have a few former Permanent Secretaries and former Directors, you would know that the Chief Accounting Officer of any Ministry is the Permanent Secretary. The Permanent Secretary is responsible and is answerable to all the financials. Of course, the Minister is also overseeing the performance of the Permanent Secretary. But under the current system, Honourable Speaker, Sir, Permanent Secretaries are contracted by the Commission and they are answerable to the Commission.

There are two things that are critical in terms of the way forward; one is about capacity. I have always mentioned this in some of the previous debates that we have had in this House, Honourable Speaker, Sir, a lot of times, we just talk about dusting the cobwebs, but to get rid of the cobwebs, we must kill the spider. But that will take time, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

We need to build capacity because we can have the best systems, we can have the best processes, we can have all the funds in the world, we can have the best technology but if we have the wrong people, if we have the wrong attitude, it takes people to operate the systems and we have to put the systems and processes in place. Rome was not built in a day, Honourable Speaker, but let me assure both sides of the House that the Government is doing its best. Let me talk about some of the systems that we have in place.

But let me go back again, Sir, and talk about agriculture. Of course, agriculture has got audit problems but that is probably better than the agriculture scam that unfortunately occurred a few years ago and unfortunately with the influence of politicians as well. Let me say that, again, notable improvements have been made in the overall financial management and record keeping of the Ministries and Departments. Why do I say this? This is demonstrated through the unqualified opinion of the 2015 Whole of Government Financial Accounts.

In relation to budget sector agency accounts, 20 Ministries and Departments, Honourable Speaker, Sir, had unqualified audit opinions, while 17 Ministries and Department accounts were qualified. For some agencies, this is attributed to legacy issues and, of course, like I said, can go back to the early years from the 1990s, I would say.

The classic examples are the trust accounts for the Judicial Department and the Department of Immigration. Let me say here, Honourable Speaker, Sir, my experiences in some of the Ministries, one of the contributing factors, particularly in the management of the trust account is when we switch to the new financial management system.

Before we used to have the manual upkeep of accounts. This is where most of the inconsistencies were noted by the Audit when they audited the accounts because we have switched to the new Financial Management Information Systems (FMIS), but at the same time the records in the computers are not consistent with the manual records. This is mostly consistent in most of the Ministries, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in as far as trust accounts are concerned.

The Ministry of Economy while being identified as the central agency for the overall stewardship of State finances is continuously and systematically working with the Ministries and Departments to improve the public financial management system of the Central Government.

In terms of ensuring that best international practices are adopted for public sector accounting, the Ministry of Economy, through the assistance of development partners, namely the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has developed an updated Public Financial Management Improvement Plan for 2019 to the 2023 period which details the key performance Public Financial Management System areas that need to be reviewed or enhanced over the five-year period.

In relation to improving the accountability and transparency, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the intention is to adopt International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), as this will be done in a phased manner. The Whole of Government Accounts is prepared based on cash basis IPSAS and the next step is to roll out the cash basis IPSAS at the agency level reporting.

The accountants of line Ministries and Departments are being trained on the fundamentals of cash basis IPSAS. The target is to adopt cash-based IPSAS at Ministry and Department level for the financial year 2019- 2020 financial reporting.

The Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) has also assisted, particularly in recruiting competent staff to carry out accounting functions. Improving capacity is a key priority for Government agencies aimed at improving the record keeping and financial reporting.

In relation to the recommendations raised by the Public Accounts Committee, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we concur with the recommendation in relation to increased staffing and training officers on reconciliations and improving financial controls. These have been factored in the Public Financial Management Improvement Plan that I have already alluded to earlier for the period 2019 to 2020 and, in fact, the focus is not only on increasing capacity but building competency and working smarter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to, once again, thank the Public Accounts Committee for the Report and reiterate that we support the recommendations highlighted and we will continue to work on the performance through the various processes that have been put in place. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also want to congratulate the Committee for its Report that is provided there. Some of the issues that I had wanted to talk about has been addressed by the Honourable Minister for Defence and Foreign Affairs. But I think for all of us as Members of Parliament, as representatives of the people, the kind of issues that we see highlighted in these reports are the things that we are concerned with. All the things, for example, the use of Government money and the use of taxpayers' money, it needs to be used in the best possible way. And as Members of Parliament, as representatives of the people, this is a very important thing that needs to be addressed.

Some of us had worked as Chief Executive Officers, we also worked as members or directors of Boards and we know the difference in the roles that these two functions have, being a Chief Executive Officer, or being a member of the Board. If you are a Chief Executive Officer, you have the primary responsibility for executing the policies of the Board. So when we as Ministers sit in a Ministry, we basically function as a Board. We establish the policies that need to be implemented in that particular Ministry.

The role of the Chief Executive Officer is to make sure that all the policies are executed within the ambit of the laws and the regulations of Government in this particular role. I have been a Chief Executive Officer, when things go wrong, I put up my hand and I take the blame for it. But at the end of the day, as a Minister, our job is as of a Board, to make sure that the rules and the legislations of the country are implemented.

As the Honourable Minister has pointed out, the Chief Executive Officer in any Ministry is the Permanent Secretary. He is entirely responsible for he has the powers for firing and hiring, he has got the important job of putting the right processes into different Ministries, the right systems, and I think very importantly now that Government is pushing the right people. Right people is very, very important. This is why we put in this system of the OMRS, to make sure you put the right person on the bus.

One of the most difficult things you can have in life is to convert a good company into a great company, a good organisation into a great organisation. It is much more easier to convert a bad organisation into a good organisation, but to go from good to great is a much more difficult thing, and I think if you look at some of the progress, some of the comments that have been made here in the Chairman's Foreword where he identifies that as my fellow Minister had pointed out, 20 Ministries and Departments were provided with an unqualified audit report. I think that must have been an improvement from the past, I am not so familiar with the records.

However, being able to elevate it to that level means there has been some progress, but to go to the next level, from good to great, there is a great book written by a person called Jim Collins and he talked about moving organisations and ministries to another level, the most important thing that we need is getting the wrong people off the bus and the right people on the bus. And this has now become the major focus of Government, to make sure we have the right people sitting in the roles of Permanent Secretaries and make sure they appoint the right people down the line, the right people on the bus will be able to elevate the performance of the Ministries and this will continue to be the focus that we need to have in the Civil Service. Make sure that there are right people there, they set up the right processes and right systems, and they are able to execute things the way that we want so that they can accomplish the kind of things that we want for the people in this country.

I also endorse all the pertinent recommendations that are made there in the Chairman's Foreword, all of them coming through on Pages iii and iv, and I also note that the conclusion in the concluding quote on Page 414, it says, "On a positive note, the Public Accounts Committee also notes a

general trend of improvement across most, if not all, Ministries and Departments.” That is a good and general trend of improvement.

Changing and transforming of Government is not something that is going to happen overnight, but the general trend in improvement is what we want to see and will continue. We cannot just wave a magic wand and everything will be hunky dory. It is going to take time and I think the reforms that we have put in place are moving us in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Bultavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I rise to commend the Report by the Committee and the work that the Committee has put together in their efforts in bringing the whole Report together and bring it to the House. A very important role as legislators, especially for Public Accounts Committee to scrutinise Government’s spending.

I also agree with the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament about the system and those who should be trained to know and how to run the processes and the systems, and how practices are adhered to at all times so that spending is not misused, abused or wasted.

We all agree that it takes time to train those we know, but again, all these also results because we are losing more experienced civil servants and there is a transition of new ones. I think the Civil Service system and the FMIS, those who are the experts in the transition of knowledge and experience, I think that is an area where Honourable Ministers can look into to improve the functioning of their various Ministries; that is one.

The other issue is, most of the 2014 reports that we are debating now, Permanent Secretaries and also the various Heads of Departments came to present to the Public Accounts Committee in the year 2015 and 2016. The Committee already told them the audit recommendations and queries on the note of the Office of the Auditor-General’s and they said that they would attend to it. When they came again the following year on a particular appearance before the Public Accounts Committee, most of the time those recommendations had not been carried forward. That is why they did a side audit to go and check whether those things had been done.

The call from the Public Accounts Committee to the Government Ministers is for you, Government Ministers sitting that side, to tell your Permanent Secretaries to attend the Public Accounts Committee and not to send their subordinates because they do not have the answers to those policies and queries. Most of the time, they evade the Committee and the Committee does not want to compel them to come, although we have powers in the Standing Orders to compel the Minister or the PS or any document to come, but we do not want to use it because we want to build a good relationship with the Honourable Ministers because most of the time they tend to be afraid of the Public Accounts Committee.

I have met many Permanent Secretaries and even the Commissioner of Prisons, Commissioner of Police coming with a big entourage and the Senior Accounts Officer, always lining up before they are called in and when I shake their hands, it is usually very cold and sweaty or even afraid to face the Public Accounts Committee. Even in one or two instances during the Public Accounts Committee where an individual was carried off there because they literally fainted before the Committee, and that has happened.

Given that, there could also be fear that could be eased by the Ministers and also that the Permanent Secretary is properly briefed for them to come and attend, and not send those junior officers who do not have the answers and who might not have the authority to approve those amounts of money that had been approved or questioned by audit.

That is just a call to Government for them to take on board and allow the Committee to do its work with the best of its ability on which the Parliament has called them and they have taken the oath to and that will be a good indication of how they can work in a bipartisan mode. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

I was the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee for three years, in fact, when the pertinent report was made. What I have heard from the other side of the House is that probably this, probably that, probably this would have happened, but I was there. In fact, for most of the Ministries (not all) when I send the invitations, the Permanent Secretaries did come. And there were certain issues that were handled, a particular Section, I am telling you I was there

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- There are certain Ministries that do not actually involve the Permanent Secretary, it involves a particular Accounts Officer, a particular section officer, a particular Storeman, a particular Junior Accounts Officer who has written a cheque or Senior Accounts Officer who has signed the cheque. So when we send the questions, it is the Permanent Secretary who is the Chief Executive Officer, he decides that this is an issue pertinent to this particular subject and he will send his officer because there is no point in getting the Permanent Secretary who has not personally signed the cheque to come and explain for someone else's actions.

In Court we call it hearsay. We want the evidence from the person who was actually involved in that particular transaction. So it is not right for the Opposition to point out that the Permanent Secretary did not attend, therefore, the Report is incomplete. It is the particular officer, which is pertinent to the particular issue who comes and explains to us; that is the first point.

The second point as my Honourable colleague has pointed out, a lot of times we have found that the major problem is not with the administration of the Government or the Permanent Secretary, it is the qualification or the expertise of that particular officer. I found cases where someone with a Diploma in Tourism was a Principal Accounts Officer for a particular Ministry. They had no knowledge of accounting practices. So they would not be in a position to make accounts, to do reconciliations. And this was a major problem that we faced and this Report, mind you, the Honourable Members of the Opposition is not for 2014 only, it is actually reports from previous years that were taken and compiled.

Honourable Aseri Radrodro, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalvu, together with the Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Dean, who is no longer here were also Members and we found out the actual or real experiences on the ground. So it is wrong for the Opposition to assume and to say that this probably would have happened.

What actually happened is what I am telling this House today, that there is a lot of merit in what Honourable Usamate has pointed out. The OMRS is supposed to fix this problem where the right person

(Hon. N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- It is being done and I have pointed it out in my Report.

Honourable Nawaikula would like to read the introduction that I have done - my Chair's Foreward and I have pointed out, as also pointed out by Honourable colleagues here, that there is lot of improvements being seen. In fact, when we picked up the Reports of the previous years and I had Reports before 2006 in my Office, from 1992 to 2006, there were horrendous activities going on. In fact, there was a particular Minister in those days, before 2006, he drove a landcruiser and tumbled it somewhere in the hills. And the recommendation by the PAC was to surcharge the officer but the then leader of the Government (everyone knows who he was), said, "No worries, do not pay." So that was what was happening.

The Principal Accounts Officer in those times, the Storeman, the Permanent Secretaries were not taking responsibilities. At least, I am proud of the team on this side that they are taking ownership that, "Yes, there are problems but we are going to fix it." But it is wrong to assume that if a Permanent Secretary does not appear, then the whole account is wrong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you very much. I know the night is taking on, the journey never ends, Sir. We grow as we go, and we note that 18 Reports were qualified and the Honourable Minister for Defence has stated that the following Report is better.

We are not here to defend or to accuse those who appeared before the Auditor-General. We are here to note the Report of the Committee. The allegations, accusations, et cetera, have already been taken care of. Those who will have to be taken to task through legal actions, have been reported. For us, it is our collective responsibility to make sure that the things observed by the Auditor-General are improved upon.

We have a former Permanent Secretary or CEO for Public Service here, and as has been brought up, the Permanent Secretaries of the various Ministries were the Chief Accounting Officers for those Ministries and they answered.

For us on this side, we tend to enjoy the fun of accusing the Ministers. The Ministers are not really accountable, they are responsible for devising the policies that ensure that we have good governance, and good governance is delivered by the Permanent Secretaries and the Executives. The Executive Arm, Honourable Members on the front of the Government are the ones who develop the policies to be executed by the senior civil servants and their subordinates. So, when we come to review the Auditor-General's Report, we note and hopefully the Honourable Minister can get into the saddle and make sure the horse is going in the right direction.

We have spoken about accountability but, Sir, the Permanent Secretaries (now we have Chief Executive Officers) in the days of the Public Service Commission, the CEOs being responsible for recruiting, appointing and disappointing, it was quite easy for them to tell the Minister, "Minister, Sir, it is unfortunate that your CEO has not been able to carry out the duties that you have assigned to him, particularly in the accounting of the public finances or the funds that are given to him to account for."

We have a very high turnover of senior officials and that is one area where lapses of this sort can come in. They have a contract, they believe that the Auditor would not be looking at their accounts

until after their contracts have been terminated or ended.

Capacity-building, we have mentioned that and hopefully, as we stabilise our second and third ranking senior civil servants, they will eventually graduate to be Chief Accounting Officers for their Ministries. I believe, Sir, that we are still on this journey and we are still growing and all I can ask is that we manage the affairs of the people who voted us into this Chambers properly. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his contribution to the debate.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee to make his Right of Reply.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, it was good to see, at least, towards the end of the debate, there was some consensus from the other side rather than what the Honourable Members who spoke earlier from the other side were saying. As alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker, this is the 2014 Audit Report and majority of the issues had been dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to stand and read out what the Office of the Auditor-General has actually mentioned in the Report. For example, I can actually stand here, open a book and read out a hundred or two hundred things that the Auditor-General's Office had actually mentioned in the Report.

But that should not be the case, Honourable Speaker, because that is the very reason that we have the Public Accounts Committee, to interview the Ministries and Departments and deliberate on the feedback given by them. That is why, if we actually look at Volume 1 to Volume 4, there are hundreds of recommendations by the Auditor-General's Office but if you actually look at the recommendations by the Committee, there are only eight recommendations. And I must mention that this is actually a bipartisan Report that the Opposition Members actually agreed to.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So why create a drama and come here and open the Report saying that this is actually what was said in the Auditor-General's Report?

If the Public Accounts Committee had actually interviewed the Ministry and the Ministry has elaborated enough for the Committee to decide that it does not need to go into the recommendation, it should be accepted. It is not right just to stand here and talk about issues and not to discuss the explanation provided by the Ministry, and if the Opposition wants to continue like this, then what is the need of having the Public Accounts Committee in the first place? Just come here and directly debate about the Report, let us start doing that under Standing Order 51.

Honourable Speaker, I heard the Opposition Members....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am a Member of Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Address the Chair.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I urge Honourable Opposition Members to take some ownership when it comes to responsibilities. I must also mention that the operation of a Ministry is the Permanent Secretary's responsibility, unlike when they used to be in government, they, as Ministers, used to run the Ministry and whether they used to or not, that is another question. At least, we do not interfere in the operations of the Ministry.

With those words, Sir, I would like to thank you for the time that you have given, for me to speak on this Report. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of ‘Noes’)

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

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, the night is young. This is when the cats come out.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to move the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE – AUDITS OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Audits of Municipal Councils for the Year ended 31st December 2014 which was tabled on 17th May 2018.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament: I, as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts who moved the motion, take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Review Report of the previous Public Accounts Committee on the Municipal Council Audit Report for the Year ended 31st December, 2014, which was tabled in Parliament on 17th May, 2018.

Overall, in looking at this Public Accounts Committee Report, it identifies audit issues from the seven Town Councils within the audit years from 2009 to 2013, and given the timeframe involved and the time that has lapsed, most issues had been addressed from that period to date. Let me repeat that, Sir, most issues had been addressed from that period to date. However, two serious outstanding issues that were identified by the Committee involved two Municipal Councils and those were referred to the relevant authority, FICAC, for further investigation.

What was clearly evident in the Report was the challenge for the Councils to modernise its accounting system and aligning it to International Accounting Standard (IAS).

Also noted in the Report was the transfer of all road assets to Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and this was in the second major issue. However, respondents that were received by the previous Public Accounts Committee in 2017 and 2018, stated that these major challenges had been addressed.

It was noted in the Report that the general improvement was taking place with regards to the financial reporting system across all Government Ministries and Government Departments. In Fiji, Municipal Councils have not been included in this reform process and do not have access to reporting requirements from FMIS and the Ministry of Economy.

In moving forward, it was noted that the Councils and the Central Government or Department of Local Government could learn from this practice, the Whole of Government system and processes which are currently in place and adopt a standardised accounting system for all Municipal Councils for consistency in reporting and auditing purposes.

Finally, I commend the tremendous effort of the previous Public Accounts Committee Members in the formulation of this Report and most importantly, to positively recommend that the Department of Local Government provide full support to Municipal Councils and take a lead role in developing a Standard Reporting System and template for uniformity purposes throughout all these Councils and further to provide capacity-building within each Municipal Council.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with this modern accounting and reporting system, the process in place with Municipal Councils will eventually improve its reporting and most of all, there could also be improvement in its revenue collection and service delivery.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those few comments, as the Member moving the motion on this Public Accounts Committee Report, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson.

Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on the motion. Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I just like to shed some light in terms of the Report on the Municipal Councils, as I am a Member of the Public Accounts Committee that deliberated on these respective Town Councils.

We note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the respective Municipalities which the Office of the Auditor-General had conducted audits on, there seems to be a lot of inconsistencies in terms of the submission of timely audited accounts by respective Town Councils. This has continued to-date with big Municipalities, like Suva City Council, Lautoka City Council and Nausori Town Council where they are still lagging behind in terms of their submission of accounts. For Suva City Council, I think the latest that we have been updated on, they are still lagging behind for seven years in terms of submission of their accounts to be audited by the Auditor-General and similarly, for the other Municipalities.

As per the recommendations of the Committee, it is clearly well explained that despite these delays in terms of the audited accounts, they still continue to receive grants from Government and there is no urgency for respective Municipal Councils to ensure that they submit their audited accounts on time.

And it is very important, Sir, especially given the financial situations of the respective Councils, even though some capital projects have been funded by Government and we note the Albert Park Refurbishment, the Ratu Cakobau Park Refurbishment and also the Churchill Park Refurbishment. Despite the delays in terms of timely submission of audited accounts, the respective Municipalities with the assistance of Government continues to undertake these various capital projects and it begs a question in terms of the capability and the ability of the respective Town Councils.

Further to that, Sir, there are also issues of high unpaid rates across the Municipalities that were audited. There was a huge number in terms of those who owe rates to the Council and hopefully, going forward, Municipalities will improve in their rate collection to ensure that the respective Councils are financially viable.

The respective municipalities that were audited in this particular report, we have various years of reports by respective Councils. For Ba Town Council, it was audited for the year 2009, for Savusavu and the rest of the Councils, some of it were 2013, some were 2012, so the inconsistency in terms of the submission of accounts questions the role of the Department of Local Government in ensuring to address these discrepancies by respective Councils to ensure that they submit their accounts on time so it can be audited and we have real data and real information on how viable are the operations of respective Councils.

We also note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that all the respective Councils are run by Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers but independently operate their respective accounting functions and accounting software. We had also recommended previously that they should do a cost sharing with the assistance of the relevant Ministry so that the same principles and same accounting software can be used by all Municipalities, to ensure that they bring everyone up to-date, bring every Municipality up to par with the requirements that had been set out by the relevant line Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also note that FRA has transferred all the roads, footpaths and drains from the respective Municipalities but still, the Municipalities are being contracted out or whatever different arrangement that they have in terms of looking after the roads and footpaths in the respective Municipalities.

Interestingly, some of the issues, for example, for Nausori Town Council, we have the old Nausori Bridge. There were proposals made by Officials of the Nausori Town Council to probably utilise that in terms of a Flea Market arrangement, but I think discussions have fallen through to disallow them to utilise the Bridge. The Bridge is still there so hopefully going forward, the relevant Ministry will probably give a decision on how best the old Nausori Bridge can be preserved or dismantled to ensure that it is not an eyesore or can also be turned into an opportunity to generate money for the Town Council.

Similarly, Sir, for Lautoka City Council, I think there are concerns and issues raised regarding the delay in the construction of the multi-purpose or multi-functional Olympic-sized pool. The delay is a concern for the respective ratepayers to allow them to use the pool that has to be constructed there.

We are happy that the new Churchill Park Refurbishment is now in place and is also with its track. That is why there is a need for standardisation and a cost-sharing arrangement with all the respective Municipalities so we can bring it up to par, to ensure there is consistency in the provision of services to the respective ratepayers.

Also on the garbage collection, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are still some concerns in the way garbage is collected in the towns and cities. Some of the works have been subcontracted out, and the work that they do desires a lot of improvement where there are a lot of stray dogs that are roaming the

streets that usually turn to garbage, especially when it is put out there in the morning. They do a lot of damage to the garbage bins or garbage plastics, which led to litter on the roads and footpaths around the cities and towns.

Those are a few contributions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to agree with the recommendations that are there, but the concern is the delay by respective Municipalities to ensure that they are up to par. Now is 2019, some of the major cities and towns are still seven years behind and I think for the information of the Honourable Minister, probably you need to ensure that you work on this issue to bring everyone up to par in terms of good governance of the respective Municipalities and cities. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the Committee for whichever Committee, Honourable Sudhakar or Honourable Maharaj for the work that they have done in trying to capture the essence of all these Reports over different periods into the Chairman's Foreword.

As I was reading and listening to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro, I was thinking to myself, thank God, we did not agree with the petition of the motion that came earlier that we should have immediate elections for the Local Government. I said, "thank God we did not do that", because this report is telling us that we need systematic standards and systems applied across local governments and you cannot do that if you just have elections and all of a sudden, we will have these sorts of problems perpetuate, they will multiply.

Obviously, as I was listening to that and reading this, I was thinking back at the comments that were made by the Honourable Minister about the fact that we keep thinking the way that we have done it before as the best way to do it. What we are reading here, paragraph 7, "Standards, however, should be the same." You cannot do that if we just have elections all of a sudden for Local Governments. We need some sort of a systematic criterion to be established across the board to uplift the whole system, and then we begin to deliver the results. So, as I was reading this, I was thinking back to the debate that we had earlier this week and I told myself, "thank God, we did not go down that road."

I think we have the sort of sentiments that have been expressed here by the Honourable Minister. We need to look at other models, other ways of making sure that we can uplift the performance of all of these Local Governments. They collect rates, the people who live in those urban town and cities have the right to expect that the work will be done well by the Town Councils and the City Councils.

So, I am grateful that we are on this approach, that the approach being taken by the Ministry is to revise the whole system, make sure that it works and then give the power back the Local Governments to be able to do what they need to do. We need to fix the systems, we need to fix the processes, we need to make sure that they are all using similar criteria so we can uplift the whole performance of Local Governments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. As you said, Sir, the night is still young and I think I have just got my second wind, Mr. Speaker, need we say more. Unfortunately, the Honourable Attorney-General is not here to hear me clear the air on statements that he made earlier this week.

This Report as you heard from the Honourable Radrodro just shreds to pieces any claims of transparency, accountability, good governance and adherence to procedures by Municipal Administrations since the dissolution of the duly elected Councils by the Bainimarama Military Regime and the practice continued to be enforced by the Bainimarama-led Government as the Honourable Members like to call it.

Mind you, this is the Report for only one of the last 10 years, Sir. As we stated on Tuesday, nepotistic appointments riddled with cronyism and under the table dealings, at least, clearly visible in two Municipalities, have been noted by the Public Accounts Committee and complaints referred to FICAC.

But not surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, FICAC has not taken any action, at least, to the best of our knowledge. Not surprisingly, the Public Accounts Committee has, again to the best of our knowledge, not followed up on the complaints. At least, it is not reflected in the Reports, nor relayed to us verbally by the mover of the motion, if that was done later.

But then, why are we not surprised? Because, Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee mandate and Chairmanship was changed under the pretext that the Committee, since Fiji's Independence, was not politically neutral and the most recent victim of this unfounded accusation was the NFP Leader, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, who was attacked on Monday by the Honourable Attorney-General, despite being absent from Parliament.

I would like to digress further

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Sir, the Committee Report actually deliberates on the Municipal Councils, not the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We cannot be talking on the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee here, we should actually be debating on the contents of the Report. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am only replying to statements that were made in Parliament earlier this week.

So, I just ask Honourable Speaker, that you allow us to digress for a little while because your goodself allowed him to continue on Monday, despite a Point of Order being raised by the Honourable Lynda Tabuya.

Sir, it is a well-known fact that Government did its best to block Honourable Professor Prasad from becoming Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee in November 2014 and no prizes for guessing why, it is all on record and cannot be denied.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are not talking about the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee, we are talking about the motion that has been moved. That is what we are talking about.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- If I can continue, Honourable Speaker, and thank you. Two days ago, Honourable Speaker, we were bombarded with claims that previous elected Councils were corrupt and now, it is proven that “the pot was calling the kettle black” and many examples, being brandished in Parliament, particularly the dissolution of Councils ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- ...I will get to my point, were not because of gross financial management, but rather, internal bickering making the Councils inoperable. And those Councils did go to the polls during the scheduled elections, despite being led by the Administrators, whose appointments were interim and not permanent.

On Tuesday, the Honourable Attorney-General tried to rebut our definition of a council, saying the Local Government also defined an “Administrator”, as having the same powers as a Council. Fair enough, but when and under what circumstances? Only after a Committee of inquiry, as defined by the Local Government Act, is appointed by the Minister responsible that conducts its hearing in public, not after a *coup* or a decision by an unelected Minister as twice was the case in 1988 and 2009.

But, Mr. Speaker, even in 1988, Interim Councils were appointed with election on interim mayors each year and monthly council meetings with the monthly Minutes of all committee meetings adopted by the full Interim Council being made a public document, accessible to ratepayers, citizens and to the media. Not so under the Bainimarama Regime and now the Fiji First Government, after two General Elections. Even if Administrators are appointed, the Local Government Act stipulates two Administrators for a dissolved Council, only after a committee of inquiry to be appointed by the Minister, one to act as Mayor, and the other to be Town Clerk or CEO. The Local Government Act is extremely clear, and it is just no use nit-picking.

Mr. Speaker, the Act has Local Government Administrators’ Regulations under which Administrators are appointed. Once again, we reiterate, let us not go nit-picking and go on a political merry go round, Mr. Speaker, we are supposed to be legislators of the Highest Court of the land.

And we are surprised that the Honourable Praveen Kumar Bala also misquoted himself of his lethal political expediency to suit his successor, the Honourable Minister’s agenda. We told Parliament what he said on 24th September, 2014, that Local Government elections would be his priority. But on Tuesday, Honourable Praveen Kumar Bala gave another quotation, and here, Mr. Speaker, we specifically referred to this Report as Minister Bala succeeded the Special Administrator of Ba that had been incriminated for an illegal expenditure.

Honourable Bala said on Tuesday, that what he actually said was that the elections was subject to the review of the Local Government Act, he is right. He said this when he made his about turn, but what he said on 24th September, 2014....

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, point of order. The Honourable Member, is again going out of context. All these things are not part of the Report. If she wants to debate, she needs to debate on the content of the Report, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- ... It is not in the Report. That speech is written by someone else, it is not in the Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker. I hope that at the end of my presentation or speech, I will be able to just talk to the fact that this is an audit and it talks not only about financials, but about the way things are run. Thank you.

What he said on 24th September, 2014, immediately after his swearing-in as Minister, is what we quoted and we reminded him that this is what we said, exactly his words without going into the details of the new story itself. I quote:

“My immediate task would be to see that we have Municipal Elections for all towns and cities. This is my priority and I will work with all my stakeholders to see how fast we can have Municipal Elections. Now we have an elected Government in place, it feels only right that we have elected Local Government as well.”

Again, Mr. Speaker, need we say more, these types of reports will keep coming back to your goodself and Parliament because of the lack of transparency, accountability and good governance. That is, unless this Government changes course, shirks its arrogance and realises that empowering ratepayers and citizens is genuine democracy, accountability, good governance and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, this is a result of arbitrary decision-making. In the cases highlighted in this, the persons incriminated, I thought they were a law unto themselves, they are not accountable to anyone.

Mr. Speaker, in the last two weeks, we have seen a dangerous trend of similar arbitrary decision-making emerging in the Fiji Revenue and Custom Services (FRCS). Without any consultation, our FRCS announced on 19th March that those with Form B taxpayers (those who earn income from any business activity) should fill a mandatory declaration of assets form and file it with them before 31st March, or risk being slapped with the maximum penalty of \$250,000 fine. The form even asked the affected taxpayers to declare household goods of \$15,000 or more and even ...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Member, we are talking about Town Councils, that is what we are talking about. That is not the topic of the debate. You have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I do understand that but I think if I continue, we will see where I am leading to.

Sir, affected taxpayers had only 12 days to comply. We know many, many ordinary taxpayers, maybe some of them are sitting here, who have Small and Medium ...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are talking about the Public Accounts Committee Report on the Audit of the Municipal Councils. If you stick to the topic, there is no problem.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I was merely making the point that accountability and transparency is very important and not arbitrary decision-making and consultation would have been a good thing to do, so may I continue, Sir?

HON. SPEAKER.- Accountability of Municipal .

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I am sorry, Sir, I cannot hear you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Accountability of Municipal Councils, yes.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- All right. I think I kind of made my point about accountability, we will carry on about this topic at a later date, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I know we still have the questions to go through for this evening but to round off, Honourable Speaker, this is the kind of decision-making, together with the operations of Government-controlled Municipal Administrations ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- ...that is causing the plummeting of our ease of doing business ratings.

I thank the Chairperson, Honourable Sudhakar and his Committee for pointing out the flaws in this Report and for highlighting that our arbitrary decision-making has led to the abuse of two Councils. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I disagree entirely with the claim by the Honourable Minister that the findings of that Report confirm the statement made by the Honourable Minister for Local Government yesterday that we do not need any election. They appear to claim that we need to fix the accounting system first.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We need to fix the corruption before we go to election. They are two entirely different things. The need for the election is to empower, it is their right to self-determination, but this is different, so this is a question of good governance.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So it is two different things.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The gist of my contribution, Honourable Speaker, is to say that the finding of this Report goes into the face of the Honourable Minister's Statement yesterday, totally, he does not confirm it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Her statement yesterday was confined to the period up to 2009 or thereabouts before FijiFirst came into being, and she claimed corruption, nepotism, breach of procedure, which is confirmed here in the 2014 Report, still they are very, very much....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am going to go through this, I am not blaming the Honourable Minister, I am not blaming the Permanent Secretary but I am just quoting from the Report that is signed by your Committee, and it confirms that. She mentioned yesterday of an incident in Savusavu and here again, it is still here so it has never gone.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me then start with Savusavu.

“2.12 Failure to exercise due diligence in selecting contractors.

The audit noted that the Council failed to properly assess bidder’s information in awarding the streetlight contract during the financial year.

In 2009, the contract of streetlight repairs was awarded to Xpro Electrical Works. Upon signing the contract, the Council noted that Xpro Electrical Works’ employees were neither authorised nor competent to access the FEA pole and do not possess a Workman’s Compensation Policy.”

The very same thing that she was blaming that were prevalent in the Councils before 2009, it was here as acknowledged by the Chairman, two incidences were referred to FICAC for possible corruption. So my point is, what she said yesterday was totally wrong. What were prevalent then are still happening here and it is confirmed in this Report. If I can just go through it slowly.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- On the Foreward ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- All right starting from Foreward: “The Committee noted

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- On the Foreward, let me ask whether they recommended convening the meeting to teach the Councils how to do bookkeeping, was that done or no? And I challenge you, it was never done, so there is no point, this has never been put to use.

On Savusavu Town Council, the Public Accounts Committee has referred certain matters relating to Savusavu Town Council to FICAC for further investigation. The same things that she was claiming were happening before and this is 2014, this is during their time. On page 7, if you are not clear, it says:

“Included in the current liabilities are unidentified land sales, deposits amounting to \$427,456. Additionally, the Council failed to provide documentary evidence to substantiate accounts receivable from tenants of \$32,000 and sundry debtors of \$16,000.

Failure to produce documents for audit - No approval to use funds from land bidders’ account. Failure to exercise due diligence in selecting contractors.”

which I have already read.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Read it again.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Do you want me to read it again, I will do it. I have got 20 minutes.

“The auditor noted that the Council failed to properly assess bidder’s information in awarding a streetlight contract during the financial year and they awarded lease to a company that does not have Workman’s Compensation Policy.”

Now we go to Sigatoka Town Council.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No. I will cover Savusavu. “The Council was unable to provide any supporting documentation to substantiate the existence of sundry deposits amounting to \$57,000.”

Next, still on Sigatoka, it says: “Non-adoption of the International Financing Reporting Standards (IFRS) and Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), lack of separation of duties, general ledgers, general vouchers not supported.”

For Nadi Town Council, I quote:

“The audit noted that the financial statement for the Nadi Town Council for the year ended 31st December, 2012 resulted in the issue of a qualified audit report.

1. Included in property, plant and equipment are roads and footpaths with written down value of \$14 million.”

So what they are saying here is that, it has been recurring and recurring, and they failed to transfer the roads to the Fiji Road Authority.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, there is more. It says: “Roads and footpaths not transferred to FRA. Bank reconciliations not done.” You want it I will get it to you.

It continues, I quote: “Anomalies on Valued Added Tax, discrepancies in debtors’ record.” That was in Nadi, and you are claiming here that you just had to fix that, you never fixed it. You have done nothing.

Ba Town Council, I also thought that Ba was without blemish, but it has blemished very seriously, just like Savusavu. It says, and I quote:

“As a reference in Appendix 1, the Public Accounts Committee has referred certain matters relating to Ba Town Council to FICAC for further investigation. As such, these matters are not considered as part of this Report.

And for Ba Town Council, “Non-adoption of International...”, and there is a lot, it is all here. I am sick and tired of reading it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- All right, I will go on, I have got time.

The Nausori Town Council, it says:

- Non-Adoption of International Financial Reporting Standard for Small Medium Enterprises.
- Failure to carry out bank reconciliation.
- Risk of debts becoming uncollectable.
- Discrepancies in the debtors' records.
- Anomalies in the annual leave.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, like I said, I am not blaming anyone. I am not even blaming even the Ministers or whoever, I am just quoting from the Report that was signed by the Chairperson and Members of the Public Accounts Committee.

It continues:

- Anomalies in the annual leave.
- Payments made to Abilesh Deo.
- Late submission of financial statements.
- Fire Service Account Discrepancies.

You want to hear it?

- Tenancy agreement not done.
- Lautoka City Council.

Well, you do not want to hear all these! But the point is, the corruption and nepotism that they claimed, the failure to follow procedures that they claimed that were prevalent in the years before 2009 were very much here in the 2014 Report. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Linda Tabuya, you have floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker Sir.

Honourable Speaker, I would just like to remind this House, let us have a bit of a simple exercise about why we are here. And the separation of powers, Honourable Speaker, Parliament is supreme and Parliament is not just made up of Government, it is also made up of Opposition. So we are here to talk about how to improve.

Now, it is usually during an audit of Government that really they can just picture a mirror that is just pulled right across this middle section where when they are talking, they are really talking to themselves, accounting to the actions that they have done and the spending of taxpayers' money. That is the purpose of the audit. Let us takes us back to that.

Now, they have been talking about the Report which was from 2014 and they are now trying to improve it. If you look at the last few years from 2006 to 2014 and the Audit Reports that have out of that period and also from 2014 to now, we have just heard that the SCC Report has been pending for a long time. I just wonder how the Honourable Minister is finding the Municipal Councils performing if

they have not submitted their reports. How else are you finding out how your Municipal Councils are performing? How else do you bring it here before the House where we, as a Parliament, can hear about it, discuss and see ways to improve?

They said that they are now going to improve it, it has been from 2014, it is now five years later, Honourable Speaker, and the common thread here is that, there has been no Municipal Elections. The definition of insanity, Honourable Speaker Sir, is trying the same thing many, many times over and expecting a different result. They are still going to continue with no Municipal Elections and it is not working. It is not working!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, the Audit Reports continue to reflect the lack of transparency which my colleagues have been talking about and the lack of governance.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, the systems under your watch, and it is still continuing. You have never tried it in your terms as Minister, Honourable Minister for Infrastructure. Yes, it is the right of the ratepayers of this country to elections, just like taxpayers. Now, like general elections, ratepayers should have municipal elections.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, there has been, again, the old discussion and the Honourable Minister had mentioned about corruption in the Municipal Councils when there have elections, she cannot prove that there is not corruption from the Municipal Councils when there is no Municipal Elections. So there is no rebuttal there to show that the lack of elections is not working. Again, it is not working.

We have talked about the issue from Savusavu as mentioned, and the continued lack of accountability back to this Parliament about how they are performing. So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just want to plead with Honourable Members on the other side to just revisit and look at their principles of good governance which I would like to remind them. It is about accountability, accounting back to this august House. It is about participation, letting the Opposition help you in your role. So when we are talking to you and scrutinising, that is our role, that is the role of Parliament to Government.

The tenets of democracy is the scrutiny here, that is why we are here. Honourable Speaker, Sir, when Honourable Members of the Government stand up, they are very defensive. Again, to reflect and say, “Alright, we have not been able to successfully win the Municipal Councils...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ...We have not been able to do this again.” They are repeating the same thing over and over, it is not working. You need to consider Municipal Elections and give it back to the people to run it, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Again, the examples that had been given in the Report and todate, Honourable Speaker, Sir, they continue to, under the Council, the Honourable Minister has been touting, “Albert Park is the flagship development of Suva.”

Albert Park used to be a park that was accessible to all the provinces close to Suva, Honourable Speaker, Sir. You do not only look out there and see the temporary fence setup because you have

Naitasiri and Suva playing there, or it has been accessible to all the people. Now, they limit what you can do on that turf and it costs so much more money now for teams to go to Buckhurst Park or to go to the Stadium, they have to hire it, it costs so much more than to come and use those grounds.

So Albert Park is not available, it is only available to just a few, unlike before it was available to everyone. Albert Park was available to everyone.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, the teams that we used to see before, they were able to access it before. Now, it is inaccessible.

So we got to rethink what we are using our parks for and who is benefitting. Is it really benefiting all the members of the public? I think not.

So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just want to remind our Honourable Ministers that what we are saying as Opposition is, we are not just coming here to give it to you, what has happened is that, the IMF has agreed and has also expressed the same sentiments, and I quote from their Report:

“Governance would be improved by enhancing physical transparency and strengthening the rule of law.”

Yes, financial practices, financial accounting and we have heard so many examples. And they have also said, “Available evidence based on indicators and qualitative reports”, I am quoting from the Report. It says, I quote:

“Available evidence based on indicators and qualitative reports points to governance and corruption vulnerabilities, notably in fiscal governance.”

That is not 2014, that is current, that is the IMF. That is the, ‘Rule of Law.’

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- IMF has to tell you! IMF has to tell the Government that it is not working, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Also, in the EU blacklist, it is the same concern. That is what the two have in common. The two reports and the two analysis have in common, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the lack of governance, corruption practices, lack of physical transparency in the rule of law. They would like the investors to come to the country, they will not have confidence, if they see this kind of blacklisting. We have got take it seriously. It is an issue of good governance and again, reminding the Honourable Members of Government what it is, transparency, accountability, participation, the rule of law and efficiency.

Seven years later, the Suva City Council still has not given their report. That is inefficiency! That is not accountability. That is lack of transparency. Yes, we are dealing with bad governance. We need to try something new and absolutely, we need to give it back to the people. We need to have

Municipal Council elections so that we can move forward and ensure that our people have a say, that they elect their leaders to run the Municipalities, not the Government.

Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

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

I also acknowledge the presence of the former Mayor of Nadi and former Member of Parliament, Mr. Sanjit Patel, who is here at the gallery.

Honourable Speaker, the last speaker said that the citizens of Suva are deprived of using Albert Park. There is no truth in it! You go outside and see thousands of them are using that facility free of charge, we are not even charging them. What sort of message is the Honourable Members are giving to this House and to the people of this country?

This is the problem, when you lack knowledge of Municipal Councils. I will tell you. She is asking, how do we monitor Municipal Councils' performance without annual report? I just do not know! If you want me to tell you, I will tell you.

Municipal Councils have got Standing Committees, about two or three of them. Every month, they have their Standing Committee meetings. And at the end of the month, they have full Board or full Council. That report is submitted to the Ministry and that is where the Ministry monitors the performance of each Municipal Council. Honourable Speaker, this is for them to understand how Municipal Councils are operated.

Honourable Speaker, there is two tiers of Government in this country; one is the Central Government and other one is Local Government. And I must say whether one agrees or not, that Municipal Councils have come a long way.

Honourable Radrodro is asking whether Municipal Councils have got ability and capability. If Municipal Councils do not have ability and capability, how would they manage capital projects in Rakiraki which is the municipal market; in Ba's Govind Park with 9,000 sitting capacity pavilion undercover.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Honourable Radrodro, Sir, you are not listening, that is the problem.

Lautoka's international standard swimming pool is under construction. There is no delay in it. I do not know where they are getting all those information from?

The work at Churchill Park has been done. In Nadi, the new Namaka Market and in Nasinu, the Laqere Market. Who is doing all these? If there was no capability within the municipality, how would all these projects happen?

Yesterday, the Honourable Minister had mentioned that in the last six or seven years, the total money that was spent by Municipal Councils was around \$130 million. But you see the views of the Opposition, just election! Election!

Yesterday, I said that it was my last time, I was not going to talk about elections, but I need to

respond. She has gone away, I do not know why she has left. There was never ever, we have said, that we are not going to have election. What we said was that, we will have election subject to the review of the Local Government Act. I do not know how many times I have said that in this Honourable House.

In last four years, I think I have said it 10 or 20 times and again, this saga. I will tell you, Honourable Speaker, why. These political Parties - in particular SODELPA and NFP, have now realised that there are arms, such as Municipal Councils, Growers Council, they are no more in place. They have realised that their support is declining so they want these to come in so that they can use all these platforms. This is exactly true, I am telling you, Honourable Speaker, whether they agree or not, I know where they are coming from.

Honourable Speaker, on the issue of FICAC, there is one case in Ba. Anyone who does wrong, they have to go. There is a case that has been referred by the Committee on the misuse of power by one administrator and likewise, there was also a matter that was reported to FICAC for the Nadi Special Administrator when he did wrong, and he is now out of the Council. So if someone is going to do wrong, we cannot continue having them and then you will be first ones to come here and say that there is a corrupt practice and we are still keeping them. But we are not going to listen to you on what you are going to say, but what we are saying is that, if anyone is going to do wrong, they must go out, simple as that.

Honourable Speaker, let us not forget that Municipal Councils also employ thousands of workers. There are thousands of families that are looked after by Municipal Councils. These are the very workers that come to your towns and cities early in the morning, sweep the streets, upkeep of grass, and today, the way the vibes are coming out, there is no respect for the workers of Municipal Councils, the way Opposition has been saying things in this House.

Honourable Speaker, the other issue that was raised, I just honestly cannot recall who that was, must be Honourable Tabuya.

(Laughter)

The Elections, as I have said earlier on, I have said yesterday and now I want to repeat, and I am definitely sure that the Honourable Minister will also highlight on, that the work has begun, the committee is in place, there had been some discussions on the associated legislation as well and the work is going on. So I do not think from now onwards, you will come to this honourable House and again, ask for the municipal elections. Let us be rest-assured that we complete this exercise.

Honourable Speaker, I thank you for the time.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the debate that we are having on the Municipal Council Audit Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had said in my Ministerial Statement on Tuesday that Municipal Council systems, processes, personnel, policy framework need some changes. I have accepted that.

The 2014 Report clearly shows that there are many deficiencies that exist in the running of the Municipal Councils. I acknowledge that and assure ratepayers that nothing will be swept under the carpet, as it used to be done previously under elected councillors. When the Municipal Councils were dissolved six times, tell me who were charged, who were taken to court? Do you not realise the ratepayers have lost the land; ratepayers have lost a lot of money in this process.

If those properties were still there, today the ratepayers would not be paying that high rates; that is the difference when you are talking about elected council and what is happening now. What is happening now, at least, this report acknowledges it and it is making reference to FICAC and they are referring the matter to FICAC. It is a clear, transparent system that if someone has done wrong, action will be taken. Mr Speaker, Sir, that is the difference, and that is precisely what we want.

I had also said two days ago that this Government will do the various reforms that are required. You cannot actually conduct election under the Local Government Act 1972, impossible, we cannot. It has to match with the electoral system that we are having now, with single boundary. A lot of changes needs to be done.

I would also like to say that the autonomy, the power that is given to the Ministry of Local Government, decision is made by the National Government. It is the National Government that creates the Local Government, depends upon how much work they give to the Local Government and that is how it is happening worldwide, and I gave three examples. I do not know how many more examples I have to give you to convince that the councillors can be either elected. It can be a mix system, or they can be appointed, and when we are reviewing the Local Government Act, that decision will be made by the public, not by you, not by us, it is the public that will decide during the consultation process, and we are leaving it to that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to improve the municipal governance, we now have a standalone Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a team from New Zealand will be in the country from 17th April for an exploratory study to identify areas where they can assist in improving the governance of Municipal Councils and I thank the New Zealand Government, and in particular the New Zealand High Commissioner, for his assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, UN Women is also funding my Ministry to develop single regulation for municipal markets.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the commitment of the OAG for accelerating the work in the area of external audit for all Municipal Councils. According to the Municipal Council, external audit had slowed down between 2013 and 2015, and that was a transition where the Auditor-General was exiting and though most of the Municipal Council draft accounts were there, at least, one year before we submitted but it took time and we all know that.

The Ministry of Local Government has been playing a more active role in organising external audits, and what we are doing now is, their yearly meetings are organised between the OAG and the Municipal Councils so that the OAG can truly highlight the problems and the financial officers of the Municipal Councils can learn and develop their skills.

Last year, the Ministry organised a two-day workshop where the Ministry of Economy and OAG discussed all relevant topics that impact financial accountability and integrity within Municipal Councils. The Councils are gradually adopting and moving towards the financial reporting system which the Government is using. We have encouraged the Councils' Finance Team to be part of the International Financial Reporting Workshop, and for them to attend the various events and workshops

organised by the Fiji Institute of Accountants. So, there is capacity building when we talk about the financial officers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going forward, my Ministry is building a stronger capacity to deliver financial governance and I accept what Honourable Radrodro had just said, that we need to standardise the procedures. I totally agree with him, and that is what the Report has identified. We need to have a common procurement process, we need to have a common administration process or financial process, whatever process you may call it. The problem why there are differences between different Municipalities is simply because of one drawback that we have in the legislation, which is called the by-laws.

By-laws simply means that the elected councillors can make their own rules and enforce it on the ratepayers, and they would change the rules and agree to it without anyone's consultation. It happens within the four walls and sometimes when these by-laws are made, it is only to suit themselves. That is how they did things, so we need to get away from the by-laws and that is where a lot more changes needs to be done.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I think the Honourable Leader of the Opposition had clearly stated earlier on, "Here is a Government that has been in operation for such a long time", and he compared and stated how we have moved on.

Similarly, there is a problem which we admit with the Municipal Council, but not to the extent of what it used to be before where the ratepayers had lost their properties. That is the huge difference and people were not punished, whereas in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I appreciate the work the Public Accounts Committee has done, and I would like to thank them for that. I can assure once again to all the ratepayers that these reforms will take place, and once that is done, then we will be talking about the election, but not now.

Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, you have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I totally agree with the Honourable Minister Usamate, the Honourable Minister Kumar and Honourable Minister Bala that, yes, we cannot have election at this point in time because of certain issues that need to be resolved with regards to the Municipal Councils, and we had a good debate.

I would also like to thank all Honourable Members who have actually spoken. But, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the debate is about the Municipal Councils Audit Report, it had nothing to do with the FRCS public notice or about a particular Minister or the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee or about the EU Blacklist or IMF Report.

I, as the Chairperson, as well as the Honourable Members of the Public Accounts Committee

know our responsibilities. We know how to actually scrutinise the report when it comes to the Committee. But certain Honourable Members, especially from the other side, need to know the content of the reports that the Public Accounts Committee actually present to this august House, and try to stick to the content of the report while doing the debate.

Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, I would also like to mention that I, as a youth and a voice of the youth in this august House, would like to condemn Honourable Niko Nawaikula's comment, asking me to "grow up", that this is not my father's house. Just because I am one of the youngest Parliamentarians, it does not give him the right to actually give this kind of comment in the House. It clearly shows that the Opposition Members do not trust, nor have faith in the young population of this nation. What a shame, Honourable Member!

The young people of Fiji need to know what they think about this young generation. This is not acceptable, trying to suppress the voice of a young person in this august House. Totally unacceptable, Honourable Member!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is my time for the right of reply.

The NFP, Honourable Speaker, on the other hand cannot accept the fact that their leader was replaced by two of the youngest Parliamentarians, the Honourable Sudhakar and myself. I will emphasise this again - they are trying to suppress the young people of this nation.

They cannot accept that our Honourable Leader has made a youth like me the Government Whip, Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

HON. GOVERNMENT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, a point of order. Exactly like how the onourable Whip had gotten up to say, "Stick to the report", he even said that this is not about the PAC Committee, he is now trying to talk about the PAC Committee and not the report, Honourable Speaker, Sir. So he needs to stick to the Report in his right of reply, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the Chairperson has got the right of reply and you do not interfere with the right of reply.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the right of reply, stick to what the topic is about.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. They just cannot see what our Honourable Prime Minister is trying to do for the young people of this nation.

With those words, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the

Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I appreciate your co-operation but the time moves on, and we will move on.

We will move on to the next Item on the Agenda.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Measures to Compensate Affected Livestock Farmers (Question No. 69/2019)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament what measures will be taken to compensate farmers, whose livestock caught the virus from the breeder sheep handed out by the Ministry recently and died as a result of contracting the sickness from the breeder sheep?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, thank you very much. I thank the Honourable Member for asking the question.

Honourable Speaker, the disease that the Honourable Member is referring to, called the scabby mouth disease is also known as contagious ecthyma disease. It is an infectious dermatitis-type disease or skin disease and the bacteria affects sheeps and goats. How it happens, Honourable Speaker, it is a virus and it affects the mouth part, so that is why it is call a scabby mouth disease. It can also affect the hoof area and the teat of female animals.

The other aspect of this disease is that, it is zoonotic in nature, meaning that it can affect humans as well, if the Farm Manager, et cetera, who is handling the animal has some lesion, he/she can catch it as well.

Honourable Speaker, the animal which gets that virus can recover within one to maximum of four weeks. This disease is not new to the country as there were reports of sighting in 1970s and the latest one in 2005 which is well before the first lot of Doper sheep that she has mentioned, arrived in our shores in 2016.

Honourable Speaker, the virus is resistant to desiccation in the environment and it is known to have been recovered from dried carcass over 12 year period. It remains in the environment where there is pasture land, et cetera, and it remains on the fur of the animal.

Honourable Speaker, the virus does not kill any animal. What actually happens is that, that is the primary viral infection so when that animal has this scabby and then grazes, because of that the animal gets sores (lesion). When the animal continues to graze from the stump of these pasture grasses,

that part gets infected, so that is the secondary infection. The secondary infection is the bacterial infection and when that happens, then the animal has difficulty in grazing. That is the time the animal's body then reacts to fight against that bacteria, so then complications can develop.

A normal thing in medical field is that, whenever we have secondary infection, you immediately isolate that animal and then try to manage the animal - you hand feed and look after the animal. Now, all the breeder sheep that were given out, the breeder was not Doper but a cross between Fiji Fantastic breed that was developed some time back and then the new Doper breed that was brought from Australia. So the idea was to get a good combination - the Fiji Fantastic which is totally adaptable to the local environment and then the second attribution Doper basically carcass content attributes, so it was mated to have a better breed called F1.

All the F1s that was given, they have the virus but the F1s did not get infection, it is a carrier. So when it went to the farms, some of the animals got the scabby mouth virus. Out of that, those farms where some of the animals died, we were able to get only two animal samples because the others they already buried them. Out of the two, we found that none of those two had the scabby mouth virus. So they died from other complications, for example, diarrhoea and excessive bacteria was found in their guts.

That sample demonstrated that those two that died, they had some other issues, they did not have the virus. The breeder is normal, there is no scabby mouth on the breeder because the breeder is a carrier. So, those farms where the infection took place, those animals recovered within one to four weeks, maximum four weeks. All the farmer has to do was just to look after them.

What I am saying is that:

1. This is not a new thing, it was there long time back and also in 2016, and those farms where the virus was, the farms become carrier and pasture will carry it.
2. It is a virus. If someone is saying that scabby mouth caused the death, no! When you have a viral infection, your body becomes weak and then secondary bacterial infection comes in, and if you do not look after yourself, your immune system gets weak and all kinds of other infections take place. So if you do not look after the animal, then the animal may succumb if you do not look after them or if you do not feed them or do not provide antibiotics, et cetera.

Unfortunately, in those two cases that we sampled, there was no death and those animals did not have scabby mouth. So the conclusion was that they could have excessive diarrhoea, the animal was not looked after and it had succumb to that. If that is the case, there is no case of compensation because they did not have scabby mouth, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, 214 farms were given the breeder sheep and out of that, 25 farms had infected animals. What we did when we found out, we told our Animal Health and Production Division to go and visit every farm and advise the famers, "Should you see symptoms of scabby mouth, this is how you handle the case." Unfortunately, 25 farms got infected and out of the 25 farms, few farms had that, particularly in the Tavua area, for some reasons.

We are still monitoring the situation, examining those farms as to why did that take place in Tavua area. Unfortunately, the farm which had 18 deaths, we did not have that sample. They buried it before we could get the sample so we do not know the cause of it. Of course, they said they were infected, so they could be but we just do not know whether that animal that died had scabby mouth disease and there was secondary infection, so the animal succumb because of the weak immune system.

So that is the long and short of the story. Thank you.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, through you, I would like to just ask the Honourable Minister, does that mean that these farmers who lost lamb and sheep are not going to get compensated because I did not get an answer to my question?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, let me be very clear.

Her question is that the farms where animals died of scabby mouth will get compensation? I am saying that if the animal died of scabby mouth because of the breeder that we gave, they will get it but the ones that did not have scabby mouth when we did the sample, and died of excessive diarrhoea, et cetera. The others that the farmers said died of scabby mouth, we did not see the sample. By the time we went to the farm, there were none, so we could not see the sample.

The other thing is that, the scabby mouth does not cause death, it is a secondary infection. They have the virus and when they continue to graze, then there is lesions, they will get infected because of the stumps of the pasture. Then they will have bacterial infection. The animal then cannot graze because there are lesions and bacterial infection, so you do not look after your animal and it gets weak because your animal cannot graze. So the animal gets weak and weak and weak and it will die.

So, immediately when you see scabies on the mouth, then you quickly isolate the animal, look after it, hand feed the animal for a maximum of four weeks and the animal will get better. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What is your advice to all these farmers who have lost their livestock to do?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, it looks like it is getting late and he is not able to get it, I can understand.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I want to go home.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I can understand the ladies here, they are mothers and they want to go, their children are waiting at home.

Honourable Speaker, as I have said, we gave it to 214 farmers. Immediately when we got the report from Tavua, we said, "Go and visit every farm where we gave the breeder sheep and monitor."

Out of the 214, only 25 farms had infected animals, not the one we gave because there is a carrier, but it is the other animals. So we are monitoring them and are looking after them. We gave the gloves and all other things, we gave bacterial infection for those who have infection and we told the farmers how to isolate and handle the animals because as I said, it is a zoonotic disease and they can get it. So, that is what we are doing. We are working with the farmer, we are monitoring it and we have visited every farmer to ensure that everything is all right. So, that is how we are dealing with it.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, can I ask the Honourable Minister; I do not think that gives the farmers any peace of mind at all. I mean, if it was serious enough, I would have thought that the Ministry would have insisted on exhuming the carcasses and making a thorough check because these farmers have lost money. I am sorry, I do not think the answer gives anyone any peace, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, I did speak to a farmer immediately about three weeks ago and he never talked about compensation. All he said was, "if you could send officers down and investigate what is the issue so that the rest of the herd does not get into trouble." He never spoke to me about compensation, he never said anything. He never said, "Come and exhume the bodies and investigate and I want to get the matter settled." No! He must have told her another story, I do not know about it.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on.

The second question for this evening, I will give the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Process of Acquiring Groundwater Assessments
(Question No. 70/2019)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources advise this House on the process of acquiring Government assistance on groundwater assessments by the communities?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR (Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Rohit Sharma for that question.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources is responsible for the facilitation of the country's mineral sector and groundwater resources. To facilitate such responsibilities, the Mineral Resources Department (MRD), through the Geological Services Division, is tasked with principle responsibilities of the survey, development and monitoring of the groundwater resources of Fiji to assist rural communities where groundwater is present.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in acquiring government assistance on groundwater assessments, communities are to request through the respective Commissioner's Office. All groundwater requests are to be verified by the Commissioner's Office before it reaches the Office of the Director, Mineral Resources.

The proponent would be required to submit a letter of request and this is to be supported by the Divisional Commissioner's Office or other relative line-government agencies to the Director, Mineral Resources Development, for endorsement. The request is then acknowledged by MRD, which will then seek necessary support documents from the respective agencies, if none was received with the request.

The work initially commences with the preliminary investigation through desktop studies and arrangements and liaisons with community contacts for reconnaissance visit. The preliminary groundwater surveys will determine if further detail work would be required, that is, if the surface water sources are inadequate, contaminated or absent altogether, establish if the surrounding geological settings, geological structures and lithological properties of the rock units, may be favourable to groundwater storage and transmission, and also if the particular area is accessible by roads.

This is followed by conducting detailed groundwater investigations using geophysics survey method with the survey report recommending for groundwater borehole drilling target. This is only if the indications for groundwater occurrence is determined to be favourable from the results of the survey and may I reiterate to Honourable Members, groundwater is not present everywhere as generally assumed, hence the need to conduct assessment and investigation before committing to drilling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, groundwater borehole drilling is conducted on the area of the ground surface where the survey result indicates favourable hydrogeological conditions in the subsurface. If the drilling is successful, borehole is then properly developed and aquifer capacity tests are carried out. Further, water quantity tests are conducted to determine the mid to long term sustainable yield for abstraction and quality assurance of the borehole source.

Water quality test is also included during borehole development to ensure groundwater meets the required drinking standards. Only when the quality and quantity of borehole water meets the set standards and demand, then groundwater can be used for drinking and domestic use.

In 2015, the role of Groundwater Development by the MRD was extended to also include reticulation of groundwater from boreholes to households. This was made possible by the FijiFirst Government through the instruction of the Honourable Prime Minister to ensure that boreholes drilled benefit the targeted communities.

Prior to 2015, MRD's role was only to carry out hydrogeological survey and drill boreholes, whilst the reticulation was then passed on to the then PWD or Rural Water Development Scheme and was found to be less effective, hence the instructions by the Honourable Prime Minister.

I would also like to brief the House that to date, more than 4,000 individuals have benefited from this Government initiative. This is in terms of successful assessment of drilling and reticulation. In terms of purchase of drill rigs, the Ministry has successfully procured a small drill rig, which is a new one, making it a total of four. Registration is yet to have occurred for this one, and once this is done, training will be provided to relevant staff for its use.

We conclude that we should be able to use this to ensure efficiency in the delivery of our Borehole to Household mandate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Can you give a brief update on the borehole drilling in the South of Taveuni? I think it was done way back in 2017, mainly in three places:

- Navakawau;
- Vatuosooso; and
- Nalovo Road.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I did not hear the question, but the areas that he is concerned about he can approach me directly and I will look at the list of what is done because this is a national approach, not a specific area.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe the Ministry of Lands has got a map of underground water deposits or aquifers, that will be an easier way of, first of all, finding out where these are and then helping those who come. Is the Ministry or the Department capable of doing that for individuals who come? I know I paid \$10,000 for the drilling on my land and

could anyone come, particularly the people like those in the Vuna area, they are running out of water, would they be able to come back and ask you to drill?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. As explained earlier and as has already been alluded to, there is a process to use. If there is a special application for a specific area, they can approach the District Office and make a request there. We will pick it up from there, and depending on the area and the possibility of the hydrogeological survey, there is no reason why we should not be able to do that.

For the second part of your question, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, currently the map that you have mentioned, we do not rely on the map because we have had experiences where we have dug into areas where there was no water. So what we do is we first do the hydrogeological test to determine if it will be viable to dig in that area or to move to some other area, otherwise a lot of expenses will be incurred and there will be no yield.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the third question for today, and I give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

National Youth Policy - Key Challenges
(Question No. 71/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports elaborate on the key challenges faced in the implementation of the National Youth Policy and action(s) taken to address these challenges?

HON. P. K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I also thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Speaker, I just want to put on record (and Members will recall) that I did mention in the last Sitting that the National Youth Policy is under review, so whatever I am going to say here is basically a general statement and not any specifics from the National Youth Policy as I have said earlier on, that it is under review.

Honourable Speaker, having said that from the outset, implementing Youth Policies anywhere in the world is a challenging one. But with these challenges, we see opportunities, and it is based on the opportunities amongst challenges that my Ministry is moving on to implement the National Youth Policy. The key is our commitment to have a well-developed and effective policy.

Honourable Speaker, this has been achieved with the support, partnership and collaboration of key stakeholders. Notable among identified challenges are these observations.

One of the challenges is data reporting and collection. Almost all Ministries are implementing the National Youth Policy in one way or another as youth issues cut across various Ministries. However, Honourable Speaker, data reporting and collection is a challenge. Ministries do not collect data, but only according to their priorities in their respective municipalities.

Honourable Speaker, another challenge that we have observed is the duplication of policies and programmes across our civil society and some foreign aid programmes. As I have said earlier on, youth issues are cross-cutting and as organisations are targeting the same audience, the likelihood of duplicating efforts and resources is very high.

Honourable Speaker, at the recent National Youth Sports Conference, I personally took note of some of these duplications, mainly in areas such as training, awareness programmes on issues like NCDs and on leadership training.

To overcome or minimise such duplication, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry is bringing together all youth stakeholders through the national conference, as well as through national youth policy and multi-sectoral stakeholders consultation committee meeting. Honourable Speaker, this will allow for more extensive and effective implementation of the policy to other outreach areas and for the Ministry to shift their priority areas as well.

I have noted that some training programmes, for example, fisheries, marine and forestry have established programmes. The focus of the Ministry will be in areas other than these, based on a study to determine needs and numbers.

Honourable Speaker, NGOs and funding agencies play a major role in implementing the National Youth Policy. However, the Ministry is respectful of their independence, agendas and priorities. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Leawere, you have a supplementary question.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Minister, thank you very much for your response. Just a question, is there a timeline as to when this Policy will be completed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Committee is expecting to submit the report to my office by the end of this year.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Government has been in place for 13 years. Why has it taken so long to design such a policy for the youth who are so important in national development?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Lack of knowledge, Honourable Speaker. As I have said earlier on, there was a National Youth Policy that was endorsed by Cabinet in 2014. What I did say, again, was that this National Youth Policy is now under review. So, what are you talking about?

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the next question.

Juncao Fodder Development – Update of
(Question No. 72/2019)

HON. S. KIRPAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment provide an update on Government's new initiative of Juncao fodder development on farms as part of the livestock nutrition enhancement?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

Honourable Member, the Juncao grass, as part of the Juncao technology that was introduced in Fiji in 2014, was totally funded by the Government of China and I urge Honourable Members if they are passing through Nadi, if they could visit Legalega Research Station where they will see this Juncao technology infrastructure there which is an amazing infrastructure and investment that the Government of China has made to support Fiji.

The Juncao technology had two components, one was that the Juncao is a medium of mushroom growth. I can see the Members giggling away. I do not know why they are here if they want to giggle, they could go out and do that giggling.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as I have said there are two components and this Juncao medium is being spread through farmers who are raising mushroom. There are various types of mushroom being grown there, that includes medicinal mushroom.

Honourable Speaker, the juncao grass is a cut and carry fodder and it has been very promising because it is very high yielding. In every three months you can harvest the tender fodder and feed it to the animal. It will grow again and can last for 40 years or so. Its stalk is like a cane and you can keep on harvesting every three months and carry it and feed the livestock.

So, what we normally had in Fiji was the normal pasture, but the issue was that during drought season this pasture was not able to withstand drought, so the advantage of this particular grass is that:

1. It is very high yielding;
2. It is drought-resistant so during drought time, it will not die; and
3. You can create silage - you can cut the fodder, shred it and pack it in airtight bags and you can keep it for three months and feed your animals.

What we are now doing, Honourable Speaker, as part of our juncao pasture project, we are identifying farms where we will go and plant half acre. From there, they will then spread it and also they will now have planting material on their farm to identify with the large livestock farms in Vitilevu and Vanualevu, and Taveuni as well.

So, in this financial year up till the end of July from the virement of funds, we are looking at 23 private farms - three farms in the Central Division, 10 farms in the Western Division and 10 farms in the Northern Division, including four Agriculture Stations where we will be planting that. Those will become the places where we will have the planting material to give it out to the other farmers. It is an amazing grass which is very high yielding in crop protein, which is drought-resistant and we can also keep it as silage, pack it in airtight bags and keep it for three months during drought.

We know what the drought months are and what we want to do is to prepare for it. So the two things that happen during drought is; pasture shortage and water shortage. For pasture shortage, this is our strategy and for water shortage, that is something that I will be presenting a paper later on about how we want to deal with water shortage in agriculture areas and livestock farms during drought. So, this is our strategy to upscale pasture provision in livestock farms so that pasture does not become a major constraint during drought. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

We will move on to our next question. Do you wish to take the floor?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have a question for the Honourable Minister; just like the imported sheep disease, this is an imported grass. What guarantee or risks assessment has he done that this will not cause damage to the local flora?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, this is here from 2014 and internationally, this is acclaimed fodder pasture. It is not an invasive species, it is not a noxious grass and it is a well-tested fodder grass. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Question and it is to be asked by the Honourable Simione Rasova. You have the floor, Sir.

Update on the Duavata Initiative - Fiji Police Force
(Question No. 73/2019)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs update the House on the status of the Duavata Initiative of the Fiji Police Force?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, community policing is not only specific in Fiji but, of course, it is a worldwide strategy where the Police needs to engage with the community and may I quote the words of Sir Paul Reeves; “the police are the public and the public are the police.”

But the simple answer is, Duavata Community Policing has been in existence for the last five years and it is progressing well. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Member.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Because the question that was asked refers to national security as well, the security of the public in Fiji, and I take it from the results of the Duavata Initiative that it is doing very well and the crime all around Fiji is decreasing.

Yesterday, I referred to a question that was supposed to be asked by Honourable Bilitavu, can the Honourable Minister advise whether the Government intends to provide security in places of worship, but I did not have the opportunity to ask that. But, then it reminded me, the security of Fiji and in terms of places where I live, around Toorak.

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your supplementary question?

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- My supplementary question is, an event happened on 15th March in Al Noor Mosque, Linwood, Christchurch, where 50 were massacred and 50 were injured, the security of security of certain denominational faith, how are we dealing with that here? It is only six hours away from Christchurch, we are five or six hours away from Australia, Hawaii three hours or maybe more. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I specifically stated yesterday that we have no intention of providing security to the worship centres, but under two circumstances - if the threat level is such that it so dictates and likewise, based on reliable intelligence and, of course, if there is a demand from the community. But community policing is about involving the community so that they get out of crime and help in our security situation as well.

There are a few approaches that we take, policing through:

- music;
- sports;
- faith-based organisations;
- youth;
- the *Vanua*.

I will give you a few examples.

Policing through youths, we have two programmes; one is the empowerment through sports where we have an MOU with the Ministry of Sports and second, we engage the youth in sports, not only players but as administrators, coaches and referees. For instance, we have this programme in Quauia and, of course, Nausori.

At the same time in engagement with the youths, we also have this arrangement between the Fiji National University and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, where during school breaks, we conduct skills training in the areas of small engine repairs, electrical, wiring, sewing, baking, cooking, plumbing, et cetera, just to improve on their skills and hopefully, get into communities as well.

Faith-based organisations, we have the 'Vueti Ba' concept. This is spearheaded by the Methodist in Fiji which involves leadership engagement and the purpose is to prepare communities to accept the ex-offenders back into the communities through community policing works. So these are some of the approaches that we are taking, and as I have stated, it is progressing well but huge opportunities.

But one that I probably need to mention here, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is the one in Labasa where we involve business communities. Perhaps, this is a model that needs to be replicated all over Fiji. They conduct their own festival and from the funds that they collect out of the festival, they have bought vehicles. Now, they have bought surveillance cameras and have installed about 12, if I remember correctly, all throughout Labasa. It is helping the police in monitoring the situation in Labasa, and, of course, there are more projects.

Apart from the Friendly North Festival, there is a Duavata Festival as well, organised by the business communities, the whole of Vanua Levu participates, and the funds go towards improving the security arrangement and at the same time, making Vanua Levu a better place for its citizens.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I see you are concentrating things on Macuata.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Tailevu as well, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I hope you do not forget Tailevu.

(Laughter)

We will move on to the next question and the lone rider is feeling lonely.

(Laughter)

Progress on River Dredging in Fiji
(Question No. 74/2019)

HON. V. PRAKASH asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment inform the House on the progress of river dredging in Fiji?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, river dredging in Fiji began in 1980 after *Cyclone Wally* came in and then there was a report done that there is lot of sedimentation in our rivers.

Immediately after that, the Government brought two Dredgers - Dredger Manabatibati in 1983 and Daunigeqe in 1985, to dredge the Navua River and Rewa River. Both the two Dredgers are close to 40 years old and they are about to be retired. The two Dredgers were Government Dredgers, used to dredge the Navua River and Rewa River.

Then in 2006, again, we outsourced the whole dredging, and then in 2012, to the China Railway Group. Then in 2007, because of the flooding in Nadi, we did the dredging of Nadi River three times by Hall Contracting (Fiji) Limited.

In 2007, we dredged 365,000 cubic metres; in 2009 - 406,000 cubic metres; in 2010 - 450,000 cubic metres; and in 2012 - 428,000 cubic meters. That is why you see, Honourable Speaker, now flooding in Nadi is minimal.

We also did the dredging of Rewa River twice, the Ba River four times and then Sigatoka River, two times.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- *Areh*, I have already said Navua River.

Sigatoka River twice and also this year. I have got details here but all I am saying, Honourable Speaker, is that the dredging is also done by other companies who get the licence through the Ministry of Lands after an EIA from us, and that is why you will see in the Rewa River there are lot of small dredges there. They are doing it and they are given licence to dredge and remove the silt material and gravel.

There are also smaller rivers and creeks that need to be dredged and we are continuously dredging them. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for the day and I give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro to ask her question.

Mainstreaming Children with Disabilities into Schools
(Question No. 75/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts explain how children living with disabilities are mainstreamed into schools?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

To answer the question simply, Mr. Speaker, this is a choice that the children make in line with the UN Convention, and according to the Ministry's Special Inclusive Education Policy. The students and the parents can choose whether to go to a mainstream school from a Special School to start and then stay in a Special School or go to a mainstream school and then go to a Special School. So it is a choice that the parents make for the children. Thank you.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Minister, for that response.

For children living with dyslexia or with autism, there are no specialised teachers in school to be able to handle their learning disabilities and even the Suva Special School does not have teachers for children with dyslexia. So the other option are the private schools like the College for Higher Education Studies (CHES), or the pioneer tutoring and Day Care schools which have these specialised teachers who teach these learning disabilities, but the fees are very high, like \$3,600 annually.

The question, Honourable Speaker, to the Honourable Minister, is: what kind of financial assistance can be given to parents so that their children can be given access to the education system so that they are not left out?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is like part of the discussions that started in the morning with the Honourable Minister for Women outlining how children with disabilities are assisted.

Part of our ongoing support at the Ministry is the continuous upskilling for our teachers. Teachers are encouraged to undergo training in Special and Inclusive Education Programmes.

From 2015 to 2017, we approved study leave with full pay for 15 teachers of children with special needs to undergo Certificate for Disabilities studies so that they can fully equip themselves with disability issues in the Ministry of Education.

Currently, we have 17 special schools with 1,149 students; 155 teaching and support staff. We are working with the Australian Aid and they have offered scholarships in the scarce skills, such as Masters in Occupational Therapy, Masters in Disability Studies, and this is the way forward. Thank you.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for the response to the question.

At the Blind School, there is lack of specialists in terms of teaching or educating using braille.

Are there any provisions with the Ministry of Education in terms of getting the teachers to learn braille?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Honourable Member, yes, there are ongoing programmes to ensure that our specialist teachers are trained in that. We have eight who have Masters in Special and Inclusive Education, 11 Bachelor's Degree in Special and Inclusive Education and, of course, nine have Diploma in Special and Diverse Needs. A total of 155 teachers have been trained so far.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we come to the eighth question and I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

REACH Programme - Update on Evaluation
(Question No. 76/2019)

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND asked the Government, upon notice:

The REACH Programme has grown over the years as an outreach arm for Government under the oversight of the Ministry. Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation advise this House if there has been an evaluation done on the project and what were the key recommendations?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you Honourable Speaker, yes, an evaluation has been done and the findings basically say that it is a very successful project and there is scope for replication in the Pacific and they have been replicated in Tonga and Samoa with Fijian expertise. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, the hour is late, I have just noticed that. So we will now adjourn to tomorrow morning, at the same time, at 9.30 a.m.

Thank you for your co-operation and for your forbearance. We have achieved what we set out to do and we have gone through the Order Paper, so we will adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.16 p.m.