

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 2020

The Parliament resumed at 9.32 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 17th February, 2020 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 17th February, 2020 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Ruling in Relation to Petitions Received

Honourable Members, as alluded to in my communication yesterday on the three Petitions from the Opposition, I now inform all Honourable Members that two Petitions from Honourable Lynda Tabuya were withdrawn yesterday.

Honourable Members, I had received a third Petition from the Honourable Viliame Gavoka and after having scrutinised the Petition, I will provide my ruling on whether it will be presented to Parliament.

Pursuant to Standing Order 37(2)(b), the Speaker must scrutinise a petition to “ensure that the petition is seeking action which lies within the powers of Parliament to take”. As such, I have scrutinised the Petition to ensure that:

1. it requests a clear action for Parliament to take; and
2. such action lies within the powers of Parliament to take.

The Petition from the Honourable Viliame Gavoka, on behalf of the people of the Tikina Nasigatoka, is against the plan to mine magnetite at the mouth of the Sigatoka River. This Petition requests that Parliament “refer to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to conduct a holistic inquiry into the planned mining of the Sigatoka River mouth with the view to protect the interests and well-being of the people of the Tikina Nasigatoka and surrounding communities”.

My first observation in relation to this petition is that, it does not specify whether the issue in contention is the authority of the Director responsible for mines to grant a mining lease under which the mining activities are being conducted, or if the issue in contention is the general mining activities of any company that may be holding a lease or permit at this time.

That said, it is my Ruling that regardless of the issue of contention, this Petition cannot be tabled in Parliament as, in each instance, it seeks action which is not within the powers of Parliament to take.

Firstly, if the issue in contention is the authority upon which such mining activities have been sanctioned, I must reiterate my earlier rulings in relation to petitions in Parliament where I have emphasised the need to ensure that Parliament upholds and respects the constitutional separation of powers between the three arms of the State, that being the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive. It is not for Parliament to direct or instruct the exercise of the Executive authority when a written law expressly gives the power and authority to the Executive, whether a Minister or a Public Officer, to make decisions under such law.

The Mining Act 1965 sets out the process under which a person may apply for and be granted a mining permit or lease. If a person fulfils the requirements under that Act, the Director responsible for mines may grant the person a mining permit or lease under sections 31 or 32 respectively.

Again, I remind Honourable Members that the use of petitions in Parliament for such a purpose is fundamentally and legally flawed. It ignores the fact that by written law, Parliament has given the authority to the relevant officer to make the decision. The constitutional separation of powers between the respective arms of the State must always be upheld and never jeopardised.

That said, if the Petition is predicated upon the contention that Parliament must review the mining activities of whatever company may currently be operating in the area, I must again conclude that the Petition seeks action which is not within the powers of Parliament to take.

The activities of a non-State or private entity do not fall within the ambit of Parliament's responsibility. Parliament is responsible for the enactment of laws and scrutinising Government administration.

It is not within Parliament's mandate to scrutinise the activities of a non-State entity. If this were so and bearing in mind the fact that some Honourable Members seem to be operating under the presumption that a petition may be admissible, despite only having a single signature, individuals may subject Parliament to a barrage of petitions inquiring into the business activities of any company in the private sector.

This is not the purpose of Parliamentary petitions and it seeks the intervention of Parliament in an area for which Parliament is not responsible. As such, on this ground as well, I, therefore, rule that the petition cannot be tabled before Parliament as it does not meet the requirements under Standing Order 37.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- A Point of Order, Honourable Speaker. The situation in Sigatoka is grave.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, when I am making a ruling, you do not interfere. That should be clear to you. You have been a Member of long standing and I respect that, but you have got to respect the procedures of the House. I hope I have made myself clear.

Ruling in Relation to Online Signatures

Honourable Members, for your information, I also received a letter from the Honourable Lynda Tabuya seeking a ruling on Standing Order 37 in relation to the definition of "signatures", and whether they may include electronic signatures.

I note that the term, "signature", is not specifically defined in the Standing Orders or the Constitution. As such and as stated above, it is the prerogative of the Speaker under Standing Order 2, to interpret the Standing Orders.

I agree that in this new age of technology it is imperative that we, as they say, 'move with the times'. Technological advancements have allowed for easier access to a great deal of services and more efficient ways of doing things. Our beloved nation has worked hard to stay abreast of these developments, even promulgating legislation, such as the Electronic Transactions Act 2008 which addresses the recognition of electronic signatures. This, I believe, will provide some direction for us in assessing this matter.

Honourable Members, section 14 of the Electronic Transactions Act 2008 states that, in relation to written laws, a requirement that a signature be provided may be met by an electronic signature if there is a method provided for identifying the person signing and the person receiving the signature consents to this method.

I believe this is a test that is appropriate to apply in this instance. As such, I must consider the method used to present to me an electronic signature, the capacity of this method to accurately identify the person making the signature and then decide whether we shall consent to such method.

In making this assessment, I have also considered the practices of similar jurisdictions in this regard. I note that the United Kingdom House of Commons and the Australian House of Representatives allow for electronic petitions and by extension electronic signatures, however, the platform for these petitions is the official websites of their respective legislatures. This is done in order to assist in the identification of the individuals signing the petition.

Honourable Members, Parliament is the embodiment of the wishes of the Fijian people – serving as their ultimate form of representation. That said, online petitions which are not hosted on an official platform that provides for the verification of a person's identity may be susceptible to exploitation by any person with no connections to Fiji, such as foreign citizens.

With that in mind, I hereby Rule that petitions presented must attach handwritten signatures, therefore, petitions presented with online signatures will not be considered. Thank you, Honourable Members.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please be seated. I have warned you once and this is the second time. I do not want to have to do it a third time, Honourable Gavoka.

Ruling on Standards for Petitions

Honourable Members, having delivered my ruling on the petition and the matter before me, I now wish to provide a ruling in relation to the standard of petitions submitted for tabling before Parliament which shall, I hope, ensure that we are all clear as to how this process is intended to operate.

I have, on numerous occasions, emphasised several of the requirements for petitions that I have repeated today and yet, I continue to receive petitions which do not meet these requirements. In 2019 alone, I delivered six Rulings emphasising these requirements and yet today, I have had to address another such petition. Honourable Members, I had hoped that Members would conduct their own legal research, perhaps reading *Erskine May's* Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament, before submitting further petitions but it does not seem that this has eventuated.

As the Speaker, I am empowered under Standing Order 2(1) to interpret the Standing Orders. In doing so, Standing Order 2(2)(c) states that I must be guided by “established practices of legislative bodies in other jurisdictions that are similar in nature to Parliament.”

As I have already stated, pursuant to Standing Order 37(2)(b), the Speaker must scrutinise a petition to “ensure that the petition is seeking action which lies within the powers of Parliament to take.”

This is a requirement that is not uncommon in jurisdictions operating under a Westminster System. It is well established that petitions in the UK Parliament must, and I quote, “contain a clear request, or ‘prayer’, to the House for a remedy which is within its competence to grant.” Furthermore, I take note of the fact that the UK House of Commons, through the UK Petitions Committee, has developed their own standards for the admissibility of petitions in order to give effect to this requirement.

As such, I believe that it is time that we develop standards of our own, taking into account similar standards used in jurisdictions, such as the United Kingdom. I believe that this will provide clear and distinct rules for the admissibility of petitions.

Please, note that these standards do not exceed the source of their authority as they are, in one way or another, simply a clarification of the requirements under Standing Order 37 or of the obligations set out in the Constitution or written law.

However, to be clear, I am exercising my authority as Speaker pursuant to Standing Order 2, which empowers me to interpret the Standing Orders and Standing Order 20 which empowers me to “do everything necessary or convenient to be done for, or in connection with, the performance of (my) functions under these Standing Orders.”

Honourable Members, I hereby Rule that in order for petitions to be tabled before Parliament, they must comply with the following standards:

1. The petition must be in English and must attach handwritten signature(s).
2. It must ask for a clear action from the Fijian Government or Parliament.
3. It must not seek to usurp the authority of the Executive or the Judiciary as prescribed by law or subvert administrative or legal processes prescribed by law.
4. It must be about something that the Fijian Government or Parliament is responsible for. This means it must not seek action from private individuals or entities that the Fijian Government or Parliament is not responsible for. Furthermore, it must not ask for someone to be given a job, licence, permit, contract or honour or to lose such job, licence, permit, contract or honour, including petitions asking for a vote of no confidence in a person outside of Parliament and petitions calling for such a person to resign.
5. It must not refer to a matter that is *sub judice* which means that, put simply, it must not seek to deal with any matter that is before the courts, including matters on trial or on appeal. Furthermore, it must not contain material that may be protected by an injunction or court order.
6. It must not seek to infringe or violate the rights of a person guaranteed under the Constitution or a written law.
7. It must not be offensive or extreme in its views. That includes petitions that attack, criticise or negatively focus on an individual or a group of people because of their actual or supposed personal characteristics or circumstances, including race, culture, ethnic or social origin, colour, place of origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, birth, primary language, economic or social or health status, disability, age, religion, conscience, marital status or pregnancy or opinions or beliefs.
8. It must not be defamatory or libellous, or contain false statements.
9. It must not contain swearing or other offensive language.
10. It must not contain material that could be confidential or commercially sensitive.
11. It must not be likely to cause personal distress or loss. This includes petitions that could intrude into someone's personal grief or shock without their consent.

12. It must not accuse an identifiable person or organisation of a crime.
13. It must not name individual officials of public bodies.
14. It must not name family members of elected representatives, e.g. Members of Parliament or of officials of public bodies.
15. It must not be an act of political campaigning or grandstanding.
16. It must be genuine and not nonsense or a joke.
17. It must not be an advertisement, spam, or promote a specific product or service.
18. It must not be of the same subject matter as a petition that has already been finally dealt with by Parliament during the term of Parliament unless substantial or new evidence in relation to the subject matter of the petition is available and that evidence was not available when the earlier petition was considered.

Honourable Members, I urge you all to consider these standards before submitting any petitions to Parliament in the future. I would also advise you all to consider whether the outcomes you seek are best suited for petitions, or if there are other parliamentary processes which may better serve you.

That concludes my Ruling on this matter. Thank you, Honourable Members.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, the situation in Sigatoka is quite grave and they believe they have elected their Members into Parliament to speak on their behalf. They are free people and they have petitioned their Parliament to look into a matter of great importance to them. That is the reason they have written, Honourable Speaker, and we know that in other jurisdictions, petitions can be raised to conduct inquiries into matters of public interest.

It is of huge concern to the people of Sigatoka, they have been writing to the Executive to the Honourable Prime Minister. A thousand have written to the Honourable Prime Minister, 900 have signed this petition and they need to be heard, Honourable Speaker. We are only asking for a committee to look into their issue and come up with recommendations.

Honourable Speaker, we are totally disappointed with this Ruling, we believe this is totally unacceptable. I am sorry I have to say that, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I

(Honourable Members of the Opposition walked out of the Parliament Chamber)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, obviously this has happened before.

Yes, Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the greatest respect, you have made a Ruling. You have full conduct of Parliament and for the Honourable Members to show such great disrespect to the position of the Speaker is hugely unacceptable.

I think we have seen this on a multiplicity of times where Honourable Members from the other side, even though they are incorrect in the manner in which they conduct themselves, even though they do not recognise the separation of powers as you have rightly pointed out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the affairs of the State, they simply want to bulldoze their way and they continuously show disrespect to this Parliament, disrespect to you, disrespect to the Fijian people and the very institution of Parliament by walking out at every drop of the hat.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is very shameful, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would urge that you, please, Mr. Speaker, Sir, consider these actions to be tantamount, not just abuse of the process but enormous disrespect and dishonour to your Office and to this very institution. We need to send a huge lesson to them that they cannot simply do this and that they should not be allowed to come back, at least, for a period of time through your Ruling, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, I have done most of the talking this morning but let me tell you one thing which you probably do not know or had you known, you probably do not remember. I am the only Speaker where the Opposition has walked out of the Chamber and also where Government has walked out of the Chamber. I am the only Speaker who has experienced that, so for me it is not a new thing.

A Government does not walk out when it has got the majority. I expect the Opposition to do that sometimes when they are in disagreement with me or the Government but it is temporary thing. But it had happened to me when I was the Speaker in the Lower House, when Government walked out. We were left there – the Speaker, the Opposition and the Parliamentary staff.

I then adjourned the House and the Secretary-General came in and saw me in my Chambers and asked, “What are we going to do?” I said, “We do nothing. Let them think about what they have done. When they have come to their senses, then they can come back and we will see what happens from there. I will give them an hour, and if they do not come back in, I am going to play golf.

We waited and within an hour, the Secretary-General said there is a delegation. I asked, “Who are the members of the delegation?” She named the members. I said, “Ah, they are thinking right. They got the right people in that delegation.” They came and saw me. I said, “I am not going to change anything, anything that I have ruled on in Parliament. You come back into the House and I will give your side the floor. I will give the Opposition side the floor as well and we will play it from there, nothing is going to change.” And that was the case.

But, Honourable Members, for now, I think we will take an early morning tea break. The Secretary-General will inform you of a time when we will resume. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.08 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.02 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we are a bit light on the ground for this session.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, to table his report. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor-General to Parliament. Thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor-General to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to table his Report.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Review Report on the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report on the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

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

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise and review the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Kigali Amendment). Parliament had referred the Kigali Amendment to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence at its sitting on 28th November, 2019.

The Committee when reviewing the Treaty heard oral submissions, received written submissions and also held public consultations in Suva and Lautoka. Those heard and consulted included the:

1. Department of Environment;
2. Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade ;
3. Department of Energy;
4. Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF);
5. United Nations Development Programme's Montreal Protocol and Chemicals Unit;
6. University of the South Pacific (USP);

7. Consumer Council of Fiji;
8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
9. Office of the Solicitor-General;
10. Mr. Daven Omar Kumar, Managing Partner Gomae Molle, Climate Change Civil Litigation;
11. Mr. Kevin Ching, Director Foreign Appliances Refrigeration Company; and
12. Mr. Seru Ramakita, Refrigeration Consultant.

The Fijian Government acceded to the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1989. Through the Montreal Protocol, Fiji has successfully reduced the use of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODSs) over the years. In addition, the Montreal Protocol has contributed in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions of around 135 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) equivalent, making it a key contributor to the global fight against climate change.

As a greenhouse gas, hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) is 14,800 times more potent than CO₂, the gas most blamed for climate change due to its abundance. The Amendment creates the opportunity and the potential to avoid up to 0.5°C of warming by the end of this century.

The Montreal Protocol has evolved over time and has been amended several times to reflect the latest findings and science of the ozone layer. It has also evolved in consideration of the development and progress of ODSs alternative technologies.

Fiji, as a party to the Montreal Protocol, has ratified all four (4) Amendments to the Montreal Protocol, namely the:

1. London Amendment (1990);
2. Copenhagen Amendment (1992);
3. Montreal Amendment (1997); and
4. Beijing Amendment (1999).

The most recent Amendment to the Montreal Protocol is the Kigali Amendment.

The Amendment was agreed upon on 15th October, 2016, in Kigali, Rwanda and entered into force on 1st January, 2019 with the exception of the changes to Article 4 of the Montreal Protocol set out in Article 1 of the Amendment, which will enter into force on 1st January, 2033.

With the Kigali Amendment, the Montreal Protocol progressed from being an Ozone Protection Treaty to one that also addresses climate change. For a region that is advocating limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C as compared to pre-industrial levels, the implementation of the Kigali Amendment could make the required difference.

As of 15th January, 2020, the Amendment has been ratified by 91 State Parties which includes 10 smaller Pacific Island Countries. The Fijian Government, through the Department of Environment, has continued to support the use of ozone-friendly technologies and gases and is committed to ensuring that Fiji understands the obligations of a party to the Amendment. The Department continues to support the work of the Montreal Protocol in the recovery of the ozone layer by further phasing out ODSs and in the process, has contributed to the mitigation of climate change.

Countries will face some challenges related to control of substance and improvement of servicing to avoid leakage. Also, the HFCs consumption tail from 2045 onwards, will demand countries to prioritise

allowable uses of HFCs. Countries will also face challenges related to the adoption of alternatives that are either toxic or flammable, maintaining safety and cost-effectiveness.

A developing country, such as Fiji, whose annual per capita consumption and production of ODSs is less than 0.3 kilogrammes, is eligible to access funding under the Multilateral Fund to support the phase-down activities. However, Fiji is yet to determine its baseline values.

By ratifying the Amendment, Fiji will consent to supporting the reduction of HFC gases that tremendously contribute to global warming. The Amendment is a binding international agreement or treaty which is intended to create rights and obligations in international law. It is designed to phase-down and reduce the production and consumption of HFCs frequently used in refrigeration and air-conditioning systems and currently used as replacements to ODSs.

The Committee recommends that Fiji ratifies the Kigali Amendment with immediate effect in order to meet the phase-down schedule and the baseline for freeze that are part of the amendment.

The Committee commends the contributions by stakeholders who assisted in the preparation of this Report. The formation of a National Steering Committee inclusive of all stakeholders will be beneficial towards the implementation of the Treaty.

I take this opportunity to also thank the Honourable Members of my Committee for compiling this Bipartisan Report. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FFIU) 2018 Annual Report

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to report to Parliament, its findings and recommendations on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2018 Annual Report.

The Committee welcomes the Financial Intelligence Unit's (FIU) effort in producing an Annual Report. While deliberating on the Report, it was evident that FIU is performing extremely well to fulfil its role in combatting money laundering and other financially-motivated crimes.

To prepare a comprehensive report, the Committee met with various stakeholders which comprise members of the Association of Banks, as well as the Designated Non-Financial Business and Professions (DNFBP) namely; the Fiji Institute of Accountants, Fiji Law Society, Real Estate Agents Licensing Board (REALB) and Real Estate Agents Association of Fiji (REAF).

The operations of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit has significant economic impact in Fiji. The FIU maintains the safety and integrity of Fiji's financial system, ensures that foreign investors, local businesses and ordinary Fijians are protected from illicit financial transactions. Further to this, FIU also plays an important role in detecting, reporting and investigating suspicious transactions and clients. Honourable Speaker, these are, but few of the many vital roles played by FIU.

It was brought to the Committee's attention that many have become victims of scams and fraudulent activities by sharing their bank security pins and passcodes. The Committee would like to urge members of the public to be extremely vigilant and adhere to the banks' safety and security policies. Likewise, in real estate dealings, the public must only deal with members of REAF, who are accredited by REALB.

Furthermore, the FIU also plays an active role towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions by 2030. The aim is to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flow, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets to combat all forms of organised crimes.

Finally, I would like to thank our Honourable Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report: The Deputy Chairperson - Honourable Veena Bhatnagar; Honourable George Vegnathan; Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau; Honourable Inosi Kurudrani; 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 Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 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.- The 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 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

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

Review Report of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition
Of Higher Education Qualifications

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. Parliament had referred the above Convention to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence at its sitting on 28th November, 2019.

The Committee, when reviewing the Convention, heard oral submissions, received written submissions and also held public consultations in Suva and Lautoka. Those heard and consulted included:

1. Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC);
2. The University of the South Pacific (USP);
3. Professor Shaista Shameem;
4. Office of the Solicitor-General; and
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Although invitations for submissions were directed to the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA), Fiji National University (FNU) and the University of Fiji, the Committee did not receive any responses. The emphasis on quality higher education is of growing importance, given the emerging challenges from the rapid expansion of higher education systems, as well as the substantial increase in cross-border mobility of students in the past two decades, both of which are key issues in Asia and the Pacific.

Based on recent studies by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's Institute for Statistics (UNESCO UIS), the East Asia and the Pacific Region influences global trends in student migration. The region supplies the most international students, representing 28 percent of the global total.

To support cross-border mobility of students and to ensure access to quality education, UNESCO initiated six regional Conventions on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, including the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention which was first adopted in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1983. To-date, there are 21 State Parties to the 1983 Bangkok Convention.

In view of new developments shaping higher education, such as the massification of higher education, the increasing use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and the diversification of higher education providers, the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention expedited a process that led to the adoption of a new Convention in Tokyo, Japan, in 2011 which is now known as the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

The Convention is an enabler which ensures that studies, diplomas and degrees in its member countries are recognised as widely as possible, considering the diversity of education systems in the Asia-Pacific Region and the richness of its cultural, social, political, religious and economic backgrounds. The Committee believes that Fiji has put in place some of the requirements of the Convention.

The Fiji Higher Education Commission is ready to be Fiji's National Information Centre as required under the Tokyo Convention. The Centre acts as the single point of contact for providing information on qualification and higher education systems. The main role of NIC are to provide information on the:

1. recognition of foreign diploma, degree and other qualifications;
2. education system in foreign countries and NIC's own country; and
3. opportunities for studying abroad including information on loans and scholarships and advice on mobility and equivalence.

However, the FHEC structure and resources need to be strengthened immediately to meet the requirements of the Convention which are:

1. Budget constraints;
2. Confirmation of leadership role with substantive appointments;
3. Review of the Higher Education Act 2008; and
4. In-service training in Education and the importance of Train the Trainer Programmes.

The Committee recommends that Fiji ratifies the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

The Committee commends the contributions by stakeholders, who assisted in the preparation of this Report.

I take this opportunity to also thank Honourable Members of my Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Pursuant to Standing Orders 121(1)(b) and Standing Orders 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts -
Report on the Office of the President of the Republic of Fiji 2015 Annual Report

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, before I speak on the Report itself, I would just like to show my disappointment as to what had transpired this morning. Sir, the walkout by the Opposition shows their disrespect to you, the Parliament and to Fijians who voted for them.

Sir, as the voice of a young Fijian, we do not understand what they will achieve by staying outside Parliament and what good will they bring to the nation. Such disrespect to this august House and to you, Sir, should not be tolerated.

Once again, the National Federation Party (NFP) has showed that they bow down in front of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and follow SODELPA like their tail. Once again, NFP has showed that they do not have their own stand or rather the two NFP members have more say than their leader himself, and the NFP leader is just the puppet dancing to their tune.

Going back to my Report, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the functions of the Office of the President is to provide support to the President of the Republic of Fiji so that His Excellency can carry out his duties effectively as stipulated in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. The Office is headed by the Official Secretary and several support staff.

Under Standing Order 38(2), the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Office of the President Annual Report 2015 on 30th November, 2019 for review and to report back its finding to Parliament. As part of the review process the Committee read through the Report and raised several questions for clarification by the Office of the President. The Office provided response to the questions and this was scrutinised by the Committee.

In its review, the Committee highlighted several findings from the Report and some of the key findings are:

1. The notable link between the role of the Official Secretary and the Permanent Secretary to the Office of the Prime Minister.
2. The tireless work done by the Office of the President in order to achieve its vision.
3. In future, the Report should cover the achievements and contributions of qualified recipients for the College of Honours Awards.
4. That the Office achieved most of its outputs and these achievements have contributed to and had great impact on the service it provides.
5. There were certain matters in the Office's Financial Statement and Audit Opinion that attracted the Committee's attention, which then resulted in the realisation of the Office's efforts in addressing the matters.
6. The Office is endeavouring to have an up-to-date submission timeline of its Annual Reports.

Consideration was given to the impact on gender when deliberating on the Annual Report, and it was encouraging to note the efforts of the Office in eliminating gender discrimination through policies, such as the merit-based recruitment.

Based on the findings of the Report, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. In regard to the link between the Official Secretary and the Permanent Secretary, the Committee takes note of the responses provided by the Office of the President.

2. In regard to the role of His Excellency, the Committee recommends that His Excellency's local community engagements be increased. It is believed that the local community engagement is a manifestation of the symbol of unity of His Excellency's Office.
3. The Committee commends the work of the Office, however, given the Vision of the Office, "To be the Pillar of National Unity", the Committee recommends that certain programmes are to be put in place that will ensure the realisation of this Vision.
4. The Committee recommends that in future Annual Reports, that a short summary of exceptional service or achievement of all recipients be included alongside the list of College of Honours' recipients.

Thorough review of the Office of the President's 2015 Annual Report and through the findings of the Committee, it can be inferred that there has been commendable effort and tireless work conducted by the Office in meeting its obligations. However, the Committee, after extensive deliberation, has come up with certain recommendations that it feels warrants consideration by the Office.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights; the Honourable Rohit Sharma, Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, Honourable Dr. Salik Govind and Honourable Moses Bulitavu, for their deliberation and input, and the Alternate Members, who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend, the Secretariat and the Officials from the Office of the President who had assisted in the Committee work.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I commend the Office of the President's Annual Report 2015 to Parliament, and request all Honourable Members of this august House to take into consideration the recommendations put forth by the Committee.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- 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.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The 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?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs –
Annual Review Report of the Fiji National University for the Year Ended 31st December, 2018

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to raise that the disrespect to Parliament and to our Honourable Speaker by the Honourable Opposition Members this morning should not be tolerated by anyone. The walkout this morning is just not acceptable and everyone should condemn their action. They have a responsibility and they should be responsible enough to fulfil this responsibility.

To the Report, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the Fiji National University for the Year Ended 31st December, 2018.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation.

As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information. The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review.

This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from 1st January, 2018 to 31st December, 2018 conducted into the University's:

- administration;
- structure;
- budgetary allocation;
- programmes and activities;
- policies;
- challenges;
- highlights;
- priorities for the coming years; and
- the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Vice-Chancellor of Fiji National University, Professor Nigel Healey, and his staff for their assistance in this review process.

I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely; Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Alipate Nagata; Honourable Salote Radrodoro; and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions, as well as to Honourable Simione Rasova and Honourable Jale Sigarara, for availing themselves as Alternate Members for those Members who were unable to attend the

Committee meetings. Finally, I thank the Secretariat for the assistance provided during the Committee's deliberation.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend the Fiji National University 2018 Annual Report to Parliament and request all Honourable Members of this august House to take note of the Committee's Report.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

HON. SPEAKER.- The 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?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to table his Report and please, stick to the report, Honourable Chairman.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence –
Report of the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions.

The Committee when reviewing the Convention heard oral submissions, received written submissions, as well as holding public consultations in Suva and Lautoka. Those heard and consulted included the:

1. Ministry of Youth and Sports;
2. Fiji National Sports Commission;
3. Fiji Association of Sports & National Olympic Committee (FASANOC);

4. Fiji Police Force;
5. Oceania Sports Information Centre (OSIC) of USP;
6. Consumer Council of Fiji;
7. Office of the Solicitor-General; and
8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions is a multilateral treaty that aims to prevent, detect, and punish match fixing in sport. The Convention was concluded in Macolin, Switzerland, on 18th September, 2014.

At its conclusion, it was immediately signed by 15 States of the Council of Europe and is open to ratification by Council of Europe States and other States that were involved in its negotiation. The Convention will enter into force after being ratified by five States, three of which must be Council of Europe States.

A major focus of the Convention is to curb or totally eliminate the involvement of criminal activities and in particular, organised crime.

The Convention is the only international legally binding instrument that helps to address manipulation in sports and provides a legal basis and framework for co-operation in this field between various public authorities and private entities. It also provides structured mechanisms for the co-operation and co-ordination of actions.

Should Fiji ratify the Convention, it will be the first Pacific Island Country to sign, which will provide a platform to encourage other Pacific Island Countries to ratify the same. Ratification of the Convention will complement existing policies, such as the National Sports and Recreational Policy, Anti-Doping Policy, Sports Safety Policy and Child Protection in Sports Policy.

Ratification will also provide the following benefits to Fiji:

1. It will ensure that internal best practice and standards are incorporated into national sports policies; and
2. It will ensure that all relevant stakeholders (both private and public) in sports and related industries work in collaboration against the manipulation of sports.

The Solicitor-General's Office will undertake a thorough gap analysis to see where shortfalls are and to initiate amendments to current legislations or propose a standalone legislation to give effect to various Articles of the Convention.

The Committee recommends to Parliament that Fiji ratifies this Convention.

The Committee commends the contribution of stakeholders, who assisted in the preparation of this Report. I take this opportunity to also thank Members of my Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Honourable Alvick Maharaj to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts –
Review Report on the 2016/2017 Auditor-General’s Report for GCCs and CSAs

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Public Accounts Committee. This Report reviews 2016/2017 Auditor-General’s Report for Government Commercial Companies and Commercial Statutory Authorities.

This Report summarises the work of the Committee and how it scrutinises the information provided by the stakeholders or the entities reported on this Audit Report. With reference to the 2016/2017 Auditor-General’s Report for Government Commercial Companies and Commercial Statutory Authorities, the Committee noted some outstanding audit issues that need to be addressed by these entities.

The Committee commends the work of the Office of the Auditor-General in trying to complete its audit on time for these Government Commercial Companies and Commercial Statutory Authorities and identified areas of improvement within each entity in advocating transparency and accountability within.

The Committee also commends the work of the various Government Commercial Companies and Commercial Statutory Authorities in terms of implementing the various Auditor-General’s recommendations highlighted in the Audit Report. However, necessary actions are required by each entity in the implementation of each recommendation that would effectively improve the internal systems and processes that would further strengthen internal controls within each entity.

In this regard, strengthening public financial management in the Civil Service is important and this is consistent with the objectives of the Supreme Audit Institutions, such as the Office of the Auditor-General, as well as creating an effective oversight function of the Public Accounts Committee.

A total of 11 entities were covered in the audit which identified issues that are matters of concern to the Committee, which deals with internal controls and this requires necessary action so that future audit reports from these entities are improved as far as financial statement audits are concerned.

At the outset, I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee, who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report, namely; the Honourable Joseph Nand (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Vijendra Prakash; Honourable Aseri Radrodoro; and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to the Alternate Members who stood in during the consultation process and these included; Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi and Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat staff for their continuous support and assistance.

With those few words, 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 this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The 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?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. The Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development; and
2. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

Each Minister may speak for 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.

I will now call on the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development, the Honourable Premila Kumar, to deliver her Statement. You have the floor, Madam.

Business Licence Reform

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament and members of the public; thank you for the opportunity to take the floor to explain the Business Licence Reform that came into effect on 1st January, 2020.

The 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan is the pillar for reform priorities for Fijian Government, hence the establishment of the Digital Transformation Programme. This is a four-year initiative implemented to oversee Fiji realise its full potential and develop a modern and inclusive economy.

Under this initiative, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism is mandated to implement reforms in the “Ease of Doing Business”, to ensure business processes are revitalised and Fiji achieves a ranking of 50 by 2025 Doing Business Report.

As part of the digitalFIJI reform programmes, the Ministry has partnered with the World Bank Group and the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise to implement reforms under digitalFIJI.

Mr. Speaker Sir, as per the 2020 Ease of Doing Business (EODB) Report released in October 2019, Fiji has dropped a rank from 101 to 102. It is noted that whilst Fiji’s rank has gone down, the Doing Business Score has improved by 0.35, as compared to a 0.04 improvement in the 2019 EODB Report. This is an indication that reforms have taken place for doing business, but it is not as fast as other countries participating in the EODB process.

Other Pacific Island Countries have dropped at a faster rate, with Samoa down eight ranks, from 90 to 98; Tonga, from 91 to 103; and Vanuatu, from 94 to 107. It is also worth noting that Fiji is the second-best Pacific Island Country to do business in.

In addition, it is equally important to note that the overall message about the performance of countries in East Asia and the Pacific Region is that, the pace of business reform has slowed down. The number of reforms in the region over the 12-month period to 1st May, 2019, fell by 10.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that despite the various reforms that were taken in 2019, which included the launch of bizFIJI portal, which provided one-stop information on Starting a Business and Obtaining Construction Permits, Registration of Companies being brought online and the launch of the Personal Properties Register, Fiji’s doing business ranking slipped in the 2020 Ease of Doing Business Report. This has happened because these reforms have not been noted as reforms for the 2020 Report. The World Bank Group Doing Business Report covers only reforms that have taken place before April/May of the year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in an effort to improve ease of doing business and business climate in Fiji, as of 1st January, 2020, the Ministry of Industry, Trade, Tourism and Local Government rolled out new processes for business licensing and renewal of licences.

Our Business Licensing Act 1976 grants the municipalities powers to establish by-laws for efficient running of their respective municipalities. However, this led to each municipality creating their own licensing regimes and different categories of business licences and requirements. This reform has introduced a standardised and simplified process across 13 Municipal Councils to improve the ease of doing business in Fiji.

According to the World Bank Group Doing Business Report, it takes 40 days to start a business in Fiji. There were, at least, eight procedures that a business had to comply with in order to get a business licence to start operations. These included:

1. Provision of Business Name Registration Certificate;
2. Foreign Investment Registration Certificate (FIRC) for foreign investors;
3. Tax Identification Number (TIN) registration letter;
4. Business name, holder's names and contact, including a copy of their photo ID or any other form of valid ID;
5. A copy of consent letter from the landlord (if renting);
6. A copy of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) letter;
7. A copy of National Fire Authority (NFA) Certificate; and
8. A copy of Building Completion Certificate.

These eight processes were illogical and created barriers to Starting a Business in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why should a business provide a copy of the building completion certificate when this information should be with Municipal Councils? So the businesses were given a run-around to get all those information before they could even get a business licence. The processes were all frontloaded and required that Municipalities ensure all the regulatory requirements of other organisations were met before a business licence was issued.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the business licence reform, a start-up or existing business requires two documents, that is, business registration and tax registration, to obtain a business licence, so we have moved from eight requirements to two requirements.

In addition, business licence applications are assessed based on risk, which was previously measured with the same yardstick. Now, businesses that are classified as low risk can start a business immediately and meet compliance with other ancillary legislations within six months. And if it is a high-risk business, for example, food handling, manufacturing, use and disposal of chemicals or nightclubs, then these businesses must obtain other licences and permits before commencing business.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reforms in the area of business licensing has led to streamlining and eliminating processes and reduction in time and cost to start a business. All Municipalities around Fiji are using the same procedure and the same application form for the business licence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other significant reforms in business licensing, include:

1. Start-ups and micro enterprises with up to three employees are exempt from the business licensing fee for the first year of operation.
2. Micro enterprises with one to three employees are given a 50 percent discount when renewing their business licences.
3. Start-ups that will operate from a property that has OHS and NFA certification, will not be required to obtain these certificates again, unless the business makes structural changes to the property.

4. Home-based businesses are now recognised and can operate, subject to certain conditions. This new provision legalises businesses, such as tailoring, grog shops and catering, to name a few, that operate from homes. This will give a further fuel to the MSMEs and encourage more Fijians to become job creators than job seekers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a business licence can be renewed for a period of up to three years by paying the requisite fees. Under this reform, existing businesses will be required to notify the relevant agencies, if there is a change in the structure within their licence period. For example, a change in the legal structure, one must notify the Registrar of Companies; the physical structure of the premises to NFA and OHS, or change in the number of employees, then it must be reported to Municipalities and OHS. If these changes are not made, the business is not required to obtain all these approvals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this reform is a real game-changer, which will lift Fiji's ease of doing business. We have been able to reduce the time taken to start a business from 40 days to approximately eight days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in many other countries, such as New Zealand, Georgia, Canada, and Singapore, a business had to meet two requirements and those are; business registration and tax registration in order to start operations.

Nevertheless, businesses had to comply with other legislation and regulations, including OHS and health requirements. In other words, responsibility for compliance rests with the business and the relevant regulatory agencies that carefully enforce the law through various proactive mechanisms, including spot checks and penalties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Municipalities will provide a list of registered businesses to all agencies to help in compliance. This means that regulatory authorities are now directly accountable for their service turnaround time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight some of results noted from the business licence reforms. Nausori Town Council has seen a 72 percent increase in the issuance of business licences in January 2020, compared to the same period last year, that is, 810 business licences were issued in January 2020, compared to 470 in January 2019. In Suva, 193 new business licences were issued, compared to 74 in January 2019. Suva City Council was able to issue renewal of business licences in less than 24 hours, whilst new business licences met the 48-hour benchmark.

All Municipal Councils, from the smallest to biggest, have been able to successfully roll-out the new process. Mr. Speaker, Sir, business licence reform is designed to make it easier to do business in Fiji, and it is also to ensure that Municipal Councils are performance-oriented and deliver timely services to citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we modernise the way Fijians interact with and access information on Government services, we will ensure that most up-to-date and accurate information is available in real-time. This is the beginning of a journey towards digital platform for doing business.

The Business Licensing and Starting a Business Reforms are part of the larger reforms that the Fijian Government is undertaking to enhance the doing business environment. Digitalisation is a crucial component of improving processes and procedures. This year, the submission and approval for construction permits will be brought online and by September 2021, Starting a Business will be completely online.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, for allowing me to take the floor.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. As you know the procedures, since the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate as well as the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate are not here, which normally they would take the floor at this time and speak for five minutes, we will move on to the next Ministerial Statement.

I now call on the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services and Environment, Honourable Jone Usamate, to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Tropical Cyclone Sarai and Tropical Cyclone Tino

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministerial Statement this morning is to highlight the manner in which preparations and activity undertaken in the aftermath of *TC Sarai* and *TC Tino*.

We are onto the fourth month of our tropical cyclone season and we have had four tropical cyclones in the region. Out of these four tropical cyclones, only two of them affected Fiji so far. These were *TC Sarai* and *TC Tino*. As I speak, there are two further tropical disturbances in our region - TD07F to the North of Rotuma and TD08F East of Samoa. Thankfully the forecast is that, these will move south-eastwards and pose no threat to Fiji. However, we advise everyone in Fiji to stay up-to-date with the weather information issued from the National Weather Forecasting Centre in Nadi, as we are still in the cyclone season.

TC Sarai was the first event to affect Fiji in the 2019/2020 cyclone season. *TC Sarai* entered the Fiji Group on Wednesday, 25th December, 2019, affecting parts of the Central, Eastern, Northern and Western Divisions.

For *TC Sarai*, we recorded the highest rainfall over a 24-hour period of 329 millimetres in Nadarivatu on 27th December, Vunisea recorded 211.9 millimetres of rain over 24 hours. This is the highest recorded rainfall in Vunisea since the station started recording in 1929.

Maximum wind gusts recorded was 107 kilometres per hour in Nadi on 28th December and the lowest air pressure of 981.9 hectopascal at Ono-i-Lau on 30th December. The weather boys gathered off the coast of Nabukelevu-i-Ra recorded wave heights of 4.5 metres to 5 metres. This is what led to the coastal inundation of Muani Village in Kadavu.

TC Sarai affected an estimated population of almost 78,000 people with some seeking shelter in evacuation centres. There were also two confirmed casualties and some injuries. The sectors that have been directly impacted by *TC Sarai* include; water, electricity, roads, telecommunication, education, tourism and health. Damage to critical infrastructures were minimal, however, impacts disrupted services for water supply, electricity, public transport and road accessibility. Flights and shipping schedules were also cancelled due to the adverse weather conditions.

My Ministry coordinated immediate response and relief action through the Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs) activated at the national, divisional and district level. National Situation Reports were distributed via email to the Honourable Prime Minister, members of the National Disaster Management Council and relevant agencies. The Situation Reports detailed the developments and actions taken in response to the impacts of *TC Sarai*.

Evacuation Centres were opened and accommodated across the four Divisions under the supervision of the respective Divisional and District Emergency Operation Centres. Information on opening of

Evacuation Centres was disseminated to the public and advisories were issued, advising the evacuees of the Evacuation Centres and the preparatory measures they need to take should the need to evacuate arise.

A total of 59 Evacuation Centres were opened which accommodated a total of 2,040 evacuees. To ensure safety at all times for the evacuees, a male Police Officer and a female Police Officer were dispatched to the Evacuation Centres. Additionally, the Ministry of Health also administered measles vaccination inside the Evacuation Centres as a precautionary measure.

Now, Mr Speaker Sir, allow me to touch on the aid coordination that guaranteed assistance to our people. The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) of the Government of Australia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT) of the Government of New Zealand, both have internal preparedness and response arrangements to assist Government in the event of a disaster. Their respective response arrangements had been activated and response actions were taken as a result.

We are thankful to DFAT for providing a total of FJ\$394,000 to assist Government with aviation support to conduct an Initial Damage Assessment (IDA) in Kadavu; the purchase of emergency food rations for evacuees; the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) or dromes; and the purchase of additional food ration for affected population.

Sir, MFAT from New Zealand agreed to provide support for the logistics involved in the deployment of the Initial Damage Assessment (IDA) and Detail Damage Assessment (DDA) Teams for the Lau Group. A total of more than \$254,000 was donated to support food ration, deployment of officers for both IDA and DDA; and urgent relief effort for water supply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this assistance enabled the NDMO to supply food ration to the respective centres and mobilise a DDA Team to Kadavu and Southern Lau - the primarily affected areas.

Upon conducting the DDA, we found that in the Eastern Division, it had sustained the most damages amounting to \$4,000,042,000, followed by the Northern Division which had \$2,925,322.12; Western Division slightly over \$2 million worth of damages and the Central Division was \$1,338,000 worth of damage.

The Agricultural Sector suffered the most damage, followed by Infrastructure, Housing and the Education Sector. The total cost of damage that accumulated from the impacts of *TC Sarai* amounted to \$10,353,000.

On 12th January, 2020, Tropical Disturbance 04F (TD04F) was located near the Fiji Waters. On 16th January, 2020, it intensified and became a tropical depression and a tropical cyclone on 17th January, 2020. It was as named as *TC Tino*.

Mr. Speaker, *TC Tino* resulted in significant rainfall in certain parts of the country, particularly the Central and Northern Divisions, and the Northern Lau Group. *TC Tino* reached Category 2 as it passed through the Fiji Group with gale force winds recorded over the land areas of North Eastern Vanua Levu and Northern Lau Group. Thankfully, *TC Tino* did not have the level of impact on the economy that *TC Sarai* had.

A total of 65 Evacuation Centres were activated in the Northern Division with a total of 2,612 evacuees. There was minimal damage recorded for the Infrastructural Sector, however, the Rotuma Jetty felt the wrath of the strong waves that resulted in the partial washout of the Jetty causeway.

The Agricultural Sector, again, was severely affected with damages incurred to crops. In its recovery measure, the Ministry of Agriculture supplied seedlings to affected farmers to replant.

The Northern Division has completed its damage assessments for *TC Tino* and total damage sustained stands at \$6,158,000. The sugarcane sector in the Northern Division sustained the most damages, followed by energy, roads, water, agriculture and housing sectors.

There was no request for food ration and I applaud the resilience and co-operation of the people in the North, as warnings and advisories were taken seriously which led to no casualties in the Northern Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first time in Fiji's history, the Fiji Disabled People's Federation (FDPF) opened its own Emergency Operation Centre during *TC Tino*. The Centre focused on the needs of those living with disabilities. The Centre consolidated reports and submitted them to the respective Divisional Emergency Operation Centres.

In doing this, people living with disabilities were given a voice and their issues were brought to light. I congratulate the FDPF for taking this proactive approach. Also, in line with the Honourable Prime Minister's statement that no one is left behind, the FDPF provided sign language interpreters, who were part of NDMO's media briefs.

Mr. Speaker, *TC Tino* brought with it substantial rainfall which led to flash floods in areas that were not usually affected. The Queen's Highway was closed for four hours to allow the Fiji Roads Authority to clear landslides and ensure public safety. Public Advisories were issued on the closure of Queen's Highway and was lifted by 12 midnight after clearance was obtained from the Fiji Roads Authority. This action was necessary because public safety is paramount.

TC Tino, regrettably, claimed two lives - a school teacher and his daughter. The family is survived by the victim's wife and four children.

The deployment of humanitarian assistance for those severely affected by *TC Sarai* in the Lau Group was delayed by a week, to allow *TC Tino* to pass. A joint DDA was then conducted for the Southern Lau Group where the Ministry of Health – Fiji Emergency Management Assessment Team (FEMAT) joined the operation and food rations were also distributed to the affected population. In our effort to promote disaster risk reduction, the FEMAT team conducted awareness on proper hygiene measures to avoid morbidity immediately after the cyclone.

The NDMO received the Northern Division damage assessments for *TC Tino* and is working with the other four Divisional Commissioners on the total damages incurred by *TC Tino*.

The Ministry will continue to work on improving our goal to minimise loss of lives in the event of a disaster. We will continue to work with our humanitarian partners and donors to ensure that the people of Fiji are well informed pre, during and after a disaster.

We have conducted Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) training to more than 300 communities and we plan to continue this work. At peace time or when we do not have disasters, NDMO conducts Working in an Emergency Operation Centre Training, with support from partners, to Government officials to ensure smooth operation of the Emergency Operation Centre in the event of a disaster.

In summing up, there are three immediate positive outcomes that I have noted:

1. The decentralised approach that we have now adopted with NDMO, working as a National Coordinator and Controller, working in tandem with Rural and Maritime Development, the first responders, the National Disaster Management Council, clusters and other stakeholders; that arrangement has worked quite well when we dealt with *TC Sarai* and *TC Tino*.
2. The new National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) made a huge difference. We appreciate our development partners, who helped to make our new National Emergency Operations Centres (NEOC) in place.
3. We also see the immense benefits of having the Fiji Meteorological Services and NDMO being placed in the same Ministry. Our focus now is to review everything that happened in the month of March so that we can plan for improvements and address areas that we continue to require improvement.

We thank all the stakeholders, we thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his leadership and support, the Honourable Ministers, all the stakeholders, members of the National Disaster Management Council, the clusters, the development partners, the first responders, civil servants and the CSO that participated and also my Permanent Secretary, who is a Controller, and the Director for NDMO as Coordinator and teams that manned emergency operations all over Fiji. We cannot stop natural disasters, but we can only arm ourselves with knowledge so that many lives would not have to be lost, if there was enough disaster preparedness. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. As you are aware, the procedure is, that the Leader of the Opposition or his designate and the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate speak after a Ministerial Statement. As they are both not here or their designates, we will move on.

Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Bills for consideration today.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will adjourn for lunch. Lunch will be served in the Big Committee Room. In the unlikely event that you will meet the other side of the House there, please, pass on my regards, particularly to the lady Members of the other side of the House. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.11 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to move his motion.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH
AND MEDICAL SERVICES JANUARY–JULY 2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services January–July 2016 Annual Report which was tabled on 12th July, 2018.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services aims to empower people to take ownership of their health and to assist them in achieving their full health potential by providing quality preventative, curative and rehabilitative services through a caring and sustainable healthcare system in Fiji.

The Parliament, at its sitting on 7th April, 2018 referred the Ministry of Health and Medical Services January–July 2016 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to scrutinise. The review of the Annual Report involved collation of information and a presentation from the Ministry on 10th May, 2018. This process assisted the Committee to fully understand the Ministry’s operations, achievements and challenges encountered during the financial year.

The Committee noted that the first six months of 2016 had been quite challenging for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The Ministry’s facilities suffered losses estimated to be around FJ\$13.9 million, but it was pleasing to note that despite the devastation of *TC Winston*, the Ministry, through collaborative ongoing efforts, managed to accomplish some key achievements, including the:

- commissioning of the dialysis machine for acute dialysis at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital;
- launch of rheumatic heart disease mobile clinic;
- development of the clinic information system, health information system and strategic plan for 2016 to 2020; and
- introduction of Two-Dose Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Programme in schools.

The Committee also acknowledges the contribution and support provided by its development partners and international organisations, and commends the overall performance and achievements of the Ministry.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this issue. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank the Committee for its indulgence on the Annual Report of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and as the incumbent Minister for Health, I would like to go through some of the recommendations and also some of the things that have been done in the Ministry of Health.

I can assure you that in Recommendation 1, Honourable Speaker, talking about the consumables, medicine, drugs, et cetera, we have just undertaken a comprehensive review of our logistics and how we take that into account, noting that this area around the world in medical services logistics have changed dramatically over the last 10 years. We have had some help with the Australian support and we hope to change the way that we do things within this year.

The other thing is that, we have gone into a digitalised programme. We are hoping that come the end of the year, we would be able to digitalise so that hopefully, we are able to keep track all the way down to the Nursing Station. Now, Honourable Speaker, we have also, over the last two years, complement some of the work that have put through in the recommendation in terms of transport.

Honourable Speaker, we have a leasing agreement that is in place and after the 2016 Annual Report, we have procured more vehicles. There are Health Centres that now have twin cabs for use and an example would be Nayavu. Currently, we have a twin cab in Cicia Health Centre in Lau, and this is helping with the work that is being done.

We have 30 marine vessels of different sizes and we have gone through a replacement scheme. Recently, we have had seven replaced with the advent of the *MV Veivueti* which has been quite helpful, Honourable Speaker. We are relooking at our feasibility of how many we actually need, given that we have *MV Veivueti* also to support us in our maritime outreach.

Honourable Speaker, one of the things that was also being brought forward in the Committee discussions was staff accommodation and I am pleased to say that with all the new facilities that are coming up now, we have staff accommodation included in them that are to the current need that will be needed. Also for further needs, for example, up in Keiyasi, we have 17 staff accommodation for married couples that I have been told, have been built as part of that development.

Also in other areas, we are building quarters, et cetera. The minor works in regards to quarters' repairs and repairs of our facilities continue. We have that going through our Asset Management Unit, and also support for major capital works coming through CIU. That is being done and the project is being managed at both, our Ministry and also the Ministry of Economy.

Honourable Speaker, Recommendation 6 talks about communication and connectivity. I am pleased to say that majority of our facilities, (almost all, except maybe one at the moment) have adequate communications either through phone, VT set or radio frequency or RT, and this has been happening over the last few years. We had this budgeted by the Fijian Government and during times of cyclone, we had been in constant contact with our staff on the ground and also on a regular basis.

Honourable Speaker, the discussions that came from Recommendation 9 is on Public Health Mental Practitioners and for the treatment of mental illnesses. There were discussions there that maybe, young doctors should be trained in the area of mental health.

As you are aware, Honourable Speaker, this is part of their training programmes either in the University of Fiji (FNU) or the university that they come from as they become doctors. What we have actually done is, we have incorporated a two-weeks attachment on mental health in the Stress Management Unit of the three big hospitals - CWM, Labasa and Lautoka, where they are posted and they work as a doctor in that Unit, understanding what it is to look after mental health patients. We are hopeful that, that will be useful in meeting that recommendation.

Honourable Speaker, those are some of the reflections that I have as I look through the Annual Report and I would like to, again, thank the Committee for the hard work that has been done in reviewing the Ministry of Health 2016 Annual Report. I commend the Report before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Health. The floor is open, if there is anyone else wishing to take the floor on this occasion.

There being no further participant in this debate, I give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for his right of reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I do not have any 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 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

I now call upon on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI POLICE FORCE AUGUST 2016-JULY 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Committee, I take this opportunity to speak in support of the motion in regards to the debate on the Committee's Report above tabled in February 2019.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Fiji Police Force Annual Report from August 2016 to July 2017, specifically on the Department's operations and administration.

The Committee, after reviewing the Report, identified issues that were raised then, but persistent in the Fiji Police Force today. The issues are identified below. Many of these issues, the Committee witnessed during its site visit on Monday, 4th February, 2019:

1. The security of the current Fiji Police Force Headquarters is a concern and the Committee believes that it is time for the Force to relocate to a more secure environment.

2. The Committee would like to see a technology-enhanced and professional Police Force.
3. The Committee believes that professionalism is key to service excellence and building the Police Service of the future.
4. The Committee is of the view that Police personnel welfare needs need significant improvement and emoluments and allowances should be paid where due.

The Committee recognises that the Fiji Police Force, amongst many organisations in Fiji, has taken the lead in addressing SDG 5 - Gender Equality at about 20 percent of the Force.

The Committee also commended the achievements of women Police Officers that have taken leadership roles in Fiji and abroad. For example, Police Commissioner, Unaisi Bolatolu Vuniwaqa, serving in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Also, recently the Fiji Police Force deployed officers on UN Secondment and peacekeeping operations to South Sudan and the new Mission in the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). This also included in the deployment of the Senior Women Police Officer.

However, the Committee is appreciative of the Fiji Police Force recognising the significant impact of drug-related issues in our society. The Committee recognises that in its reforms, the Fiji Police Force has established a Narcotics Directorate with full capability.

The Committee notes that the Fiji Police Force is undergoing reforms and restructure whilst it continues with its core function of maintaining law and order, as well as forging and strengthening local and international partnerships to combat and prevent transnational crime.

The Fiji Police Force had worked diligently to achieve its 8 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) under challenging circumstances. The Committee recognises that this has been imposed on the Force under the Strategic Framework for Change and Coordinating Office and does not adequately measure the performance of the Force.

The Committee recommends six pathways moving forward, and I will focus on two recommendations:

1. The Committee noted the disparity in the data collection by Police and what is happening on the ground. The Committee recommends that relevant training be conducted and the provision of an appropriate technology to assist the Police in improving the efficiency of its data collection, collation and dissemination.
2. In order to increase the crime detection rate, the Committee recommends that Government allocate adequate resources to improve investigation capability through appropriate technology and professional training. The Committee recommends also that the relevant laws be reviewed and enacted, to allow the Police Force to respond effectively to the complexity of crimes in Fiji today.

Honourable Speaker, it is anticipated that the recommendations by the Committee has been actioned by the Government, the relevant line Ministry and the Fiji Police Force.

Honourable Speaker, with those few comments, as a Member, I support the recommendations of the Report before the House and I thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Chairperson.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Now, that it is being seconded, it is open for debate. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Honourable Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Report that is before us this afternoon. I would like to applaud the Fiji Police Force for the continued improvement in the recruitment of women into the Force, which I understand sits at 20 percent at the moment. We hope that there will be a continued rise in the statistics in relation to women in the Fiji Police Force.

I would also like to congratulate the Fiji Police Force for the continued implementation of the No-Drop Policy which has been identified in this Report, in relation to domestic violence. Frontline responders in the Fiji Police Force are encouraged to implement the No-Drop Policy without any exception, and to be sensitive to the usually vulnerable position the survivors of domestic violence are in when they do report cases of domestic violence to the Fiji Police Force.

I also thank the Fiji Police Force for their active participation in the Elimination of Violence Against Women Taskforce, an inter-agency taskforce between Government and the Non-Government sector in aligning the stakeholders for domestic violence, aligning the processes and procedures within each institution and between institutions when responding to cases of domestic violence. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Minister for Defence, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As the Minister responsible for Defence and National Security, I wish to contribute to the motion before the House this afternoon. First, let me acknowledge the work of the Committee and, of course, the findings and the recommendations, as well as the challenges that they have highlighted in the Report.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the reforms transforming the Fiji Police Force is an ongoing process and there is work in progress. There are lots of challenges but, of course, within the resources allocated to the Fiji Police Force, the Commissioner and his team are doing their best in trying to modernise the Force so that it can be both, effective and efficient, given the changing environment that we are currently experiencing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I wish to assure all Fijians that the Ministry is working very closely with the Fiji Police Force in trying to implement the reform according to the 5-Year Plan that the Fiji Police already has, and I have on few occasions highlighted some of the elements of the reform before the House and, of course, giving assurance that we will continue to work on the remaining aspects of this Reform with the aim of modernising the Fiji Police Force.

I have mentioned already in this august House, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that when I came in as Minister last year, I noted the progress made but at the same time, I wish to highlight the importance of the role that the Fiji Police Force plays. May I say it again, this afternoon, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we need national security for development, economic progress and security as well.

Likewise, we need economic security for national security as well. For that reason and that very purpose, I have been engaging consistently with the Commissioner of Police and his team in trying to work on some critical areas where probably will not involve costs, but what I term as within our sphere of influence which can help in improving the effectiveness and the efficiency of the Fiji Police Force.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we have this Report before us, I also must say that I have learnt a lot from the visits that I have been undertaking since I came into office. I have just, again, visited a few of the stations in the Central Division, mainly the Southern Command in Nabua, Eastern Command in Nausori and the Stations in Valelevu and Samabula. In the last few weeks, I continued with the few remaining stations and outposts in Vanua Levu, namely; Korotasere, Saqani, Wainikoro and Taveuni.

So, most of the findings in the Committee's Report are relevant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and as I have stated, as the Minister responsible, I have also noted areas where we can make significant improvements and perhaps, with minimal costs. Let me just touch on a few of the recommendations in the Report and one is on data.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I have made recommendations as well to the Fiji Police Force and I think, over time, the Commissioner of Police will look into this and for data, it is always best that we have qualified statisticians. They handle data best. Although the Police Force is a specialised unit in terms of the work that they undertake, but when it comes to data, it is best that data be handled by qualified statisticians. They understand the terminology, methodology, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this is a critical area and not only that, perhaps we will touch on technology as well because it is related to data and that will help a lot. Of course, we agree and the Police Force is continuing with the inclusion of new technologies, new equipment to help the policing work and this is something that I have noted during my visits and I have been conveying that to the Senior Management of the Fiji Police Force. We need to use more of technologies so that we can relieve most of the policemen and policewomen, so that they can be engaged in other policing roles, if we make more and good use of the technologies that are available.

The Fiji Police Force, in some cases, is still used to the old method of doing work and in some instances, it is just a matter of improving the processes and systems within that will make significant improvement. This, apart from the technology and the need for qualified statisticians, will help in the collation, interpretation and the dissemination of appropriate data.

But let me say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Fiji Police Force is one of the first in the region to use the GIS system where data is looked at in terms of region and, of course, gives the Fiji Police Force the ability to analyse the trend and the types of crimes being committed. So that is a positive step in that direction in terms of the use of technology to assist in data collection and not only that, also analysis so that they can come up with effective strategies as well. Again, this is work in progress and we will continue to source relevant technology and equipment to the Fiji Police Force.

We had a long discussion on these with the Honourable Minister for Economy and Attorney-General on Saturday. Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is in the Report, in fact, was discussed between us when we discussed about this year and the focus for the Fiji Police Force and, of course, the RFMF and other institutions that come under the Ministry of Defence and National Security.

On the issue about the security of the Police Headquarters, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, there are risks but risks can be reduced. Risks can be transferred, they can be mitigated and can be managed within the parameters of the security situation and, of course, the resource allocation in Government.

I did mention yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there are competing priorities and needs within the machineries of Government in terms of the allocation of resources. Definitely there is and hopefully there can be a purpose-built headquarters for the Fiji Police Force in the years to come and may not necessarily be from Government coffers but maybe from our strategic friends and partners.

As a security organisation, the Fiji Police Force has measures in place. Although it is in a very populated and high traffic area and, of course, co-located with a shopping complex, the risks are well understood. The Commissioner and his team have put measures in place to mitigate or manage some of the risks that do exist.

On legislation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is an area that we are working on and I am glad to say in this august House that the review of the Police Act is almost complete now. We have been working very closely with the Office of the Solicitor-General in making the relevant amendments where necessary. I did approach the Solicitor-General early last year about the archaic laws that we have in the Ministry concerning the RFMF and, of course, the Fiji Police Force.

The good advice that we received from the Office of the Solicitor-General (I have shared this with fellow Ministers as well who are intending or who have issues with laws) is that, we are the daily users of the law and in this case, the Police Act and its amendments and improvements, we are the best to provide advice to the Office of the Solicitor-General.

That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is something that we have done. I will not go into the details but I think as the year unfolds, we will have most of these laws coming into Parliament for the process of getting it amended, et cetera.

That is also work in progress but I am glad to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that both the institutions, the RFMF and the Police Force, are making significant progress in that particular area. Of course, we are also aware that there are overlaps and duplication.

We are in close consultation with the Ministry of Local Government, particularly on public places and things like that. That is why the consultation, and when it comes to related acts on drugs, there is also wide consultations between all the parties and stakeholders and this is taking some time. But let me assure every Fijian and this august House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we are doing our best to get this fixed, so that it can be brought into Parliament for the due process.

On gender issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the next target now for the Police Force is to raise the number of women employed in the Fiji Police Force from the current 20 percent to 30 percent. Of course, the Commissioner and his team are working very hard on that. We acknowledge the great work and the contribution by our women in the Fiji Police Force. That is also work in progress, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On allowances, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this House very well knows that this Government had raised the emoluments for the security forces, not only the RFMF but Corrections Service, the Ministry of Justice and, of course, the Fiji Police Force. Over time, the need to review the terms and conditions of our people will be considered and, of course, in close consultations with key stakeholders, particularly with the Ministry of Economy.

At the same time, let me say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that in terms of special allowances particularly, again, this is tied in with the review of the Police Act and the other legislations and regulations that they have in place. I have highlighted a few to the management of the Fiji Police Force based on my observations as I visit the stations and the respective divisional headquarters and, of course, the Fiji Police Force Headquarters as well. Let me assure this august House and every Fijian and member of the Fiji Police Force that their welfare is of paramount importance to Government.

The Honourable Minister for Economy did state yesterday that Government is paying about \$4 million per day on salaries. That includes all the other benefits that come with it, including allowances, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Definitely, there is a need to review some specific areas considering the type of work that the Police is involved in. If I may highlight one or two, one is on Risk Allowance.

You very well understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the RFMF do enjoy this, those particularly involved with Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD), heights and depths - the risk allowance. This is probably an area that will need to be considered. Likewise on their health and safety aspect as well, apart from Occupational Health & Safety (OHS), people are exposed to environments that probably will pose health problems in future.

I did mention to the Honourable Attorney-General about storage places, particularly where stolen goods are kept and awaiting the court system to take place. This is where we have a lot of problems, particularly, those that can pose health issues. Those are areas in which they can be exposed to health issues and that needs to be considered.

Likewise, those who maybe on hardship, those that go on drug raids, there are a lot of risks involved and, of course, given the places where drugs are planted in Fiji, there are a lot of risks involved, particularly the challenges with terrain, et cetera. Also, the discharges from some of these plants pose risks to the health of police officers and these are some of the things that we are considering.

I also note in the Review Report that they have highlighted about managing the stress levels in the Fiji Police Force. We did discuss this with the Honourable Attorney-General on Saturday and I did state that probably in the restructure of the Fiji Police Force, they need to have qualified psychologists to assist them in managing the stress levels within the Fiji Police Force.

I very well understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pressure on most of the policemen and women police officers who are deployed to the various stations throughout Fiji and most of them unnecessarily, I would say, have a lot on their shoulders because of the lack of technology and proper equipment but we have very high expectations on them. Therefore, stress management should be a key component of processes and systems in the workplace and, therefore, I am considering and will recommend to the Fiji Police Force in their reform to have a specialist psychologist in the Fiji Police Force.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you very well understand that they are exposed to traumatic incidents and trauma does not die a natural death. It needs therapy and not only that, stress is cumulative. Therefore, the Fiji Police Force needs to seriously consider, and I will again discuss this with the Commissioner of Police on the employment of a psychologist to be part of the Unit so that proper counselling and advice is given to them as they conduct their daily duties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I thank the Committee for their Report, findings and recommendations. Let me again assure this august House that reforms in the Fiji Police Force is work in progress and we take seriously the findings of this Report. Of course, we will make sure that within the resources allocated, we

will do our best to continue with the good work and I just wish to acknowledge again the Commissioner and his team for an excellent work in trying to modernise the Fiji Police Force. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Dr. Govind, you have the floor.

HON. DR. S. GOVIND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a Member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence who was given the opportunity to review this Report, I would like to make a very short contribution.

First of all, I would like to thank the Commissioner of Police and the Fiji Police Force for initiating a very cost-effective strategy of involving the community into the Police Force work. Under the Duavata Programme, they have initiated many crime prevention committees whereby the community has the opportunity to contribute to police work.

I had a personal experience of such a committee in my own area where a committee was set up with the help of the Police and the Committee is very active, not only in having regular meetings but also gathering intelligence to support Police work. Also over the period, the Police has provided police personnel in rural areas with a lot of vehicles and transport. So I would like to thank the Government for suddenly seeing the number of vehicles and motorcycles at community level which is very encouraging and people are very grateful for that.

The Community Policing Initiative has also seen that many of the petty crimes that happened at community level have been brought to the attention of the Police at odd times of the night and the Police are very active in responding to such crimes. This has also involved crimes, such as drugs because many people have the habit of coming to the coastline and using marijuana and other drugs at night. But because of community participation into Police work, many of these incidents have been brought to the Police attention and have been stopped. So I would like to thank the Commissioner of Police for initiating such a cost-effective strategy and this would be extended around the country.

I would like to also thank those who have their meeting at very odd times during weekends and it is very encouraging to see the Commissioner and the OCPD from local levels sending Police officers to those meetings who actively participate at their own cost. So this is all very encouraging initiative and such cost-effective strategies are very much welcome. Thank you very much for allowing me to contribute towards the debate. I support the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now call upon the Chairperson for his right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Honourable Speaker, 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 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

We will go to the second Oral Question for today, and I hope that the Honourable Member responsible is ready. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind to ask Question No. 13/2020.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Flood Monitoring and Measure of Public Awareness (Question No. 13/2020)

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services advise Parliament on what the Ministry has in place to monitor flooding and measures of awareness to the general public?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind for his question basically on what the Ministry is doing to monitor flooding and raise awareness on the things that we generally need to look at.

I think we are very grateful in the Ministry that with the coming out of the Fiji Meteorological Service to be part of the Ministry also have access to the people who specialise in hydrology that are part of the Fiji Meteorological Service. This is a key tool that we use to try to make sure that we can monitor flooding.

As part of the Meteorological Unit, they have a Hydrological Unit and our focus now is on expanding this Hydrological Unit which does two things:

1. It keeps track of rainfall; and
2. it keeps track of the level of water in all of our major rivers and streams that lead to flood basins all across the country.

Currently, we have 40 of these Hydrological Telemetry Stations installed in various parts of Fiji; Western Division, Northern Division and in the Central Division. Every year, we are looking to add an additional seven station so we can increase the coverage, so we can keep track of the volume of rainfall that is falling all across Fiji and where the likely floods are going to take place in the likely flood basins.

Once again, in the new budget year, we will be looking at another seven additional sites to complement the 40 that we have already. The new ones will be located mostly in Vanua Levu and also in the Naboutini Flats in Serua. As we know that this year, we had some flood in that particular area so we are continually looking to expand our hydrology network. Next year, we will be seeing additional sites that we hope to do in Cakaudrove, Bua and also in Naboutini Flats.

The current practice of forecasting of floods, Mr. Speaker, Sir, depends on looking at the various levels of the rivers as we keep track of the rising level of water in the rivers. Different rivers in Fiji, different streams we have different levels where we issue alerts. If the water rises to a certain degree and then a warning when it reaches another level. For instance, in Nabukaluka, if the water rises by around four metres,

an alert is issued and if it rises five metres, then a warning is issued. So when the warning is issued, we can be sure that there is a highly likelihood of a flood taking place.

Flash floods are caused by many different things, intense rainfall, from slow moving thunder storms, tropical cyclones, rainfall over the hills and mountains, conditions of the soil and too much water already in the soil, so these are the things that we always have to be able to track.

One of the new tools that has been brought in by the Meteorological Office now is the development of the Fiji Flash Flood Guidance System. This is a system that will allow us to keep track of the likelihood of floods.

People who were involved in the discussions on monitoring *TC Sarai* will see that the Meteorological Office now has a tool where they have mapped out all the likely flood areas in Fiji. They demarcated them into small units and we can track at this point in time where there is likelihood of a flood taking place and we issue advisories and warnings. We hope that the members of the public will pay special attention to all these warnings that they have given out.

When we have cyclones, the biggest disaster that always happens in Fiji is not the cyclone wind, it is the floods that happen much more frequently. We are now fine tuning up tools to be able to forecast these flood and as a result of this, we hope to be able to keep our people safe and see if our infrastructure can save the people in this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. No supplementary questions?

The third Oral Question. We go to the fourth Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata to ask Question No. 15/2020.

Controlling Scabies in Children
(Question No. 15/2020)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament what measures the Ministry has taken to control scabies as it is equally important as measles is linked to the development of rheumatic heart disease and kidney disease in children?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

Yes, it is indeed true, scabies is a cause of rheumatic heart disease and also kidney disease in children by being a source of infection in which the bacteria comes through and damages the heart and the kidney through an immunological response. It is very important that we look at ways to be able to eradicate scabies in the community so that we can prevent our children from getting glomerulonephritis or damage to the kidneys and also rheumatic heart diseases which can also affect them when they grow up and limit their quality of life.

Honourable Speaker, scabies was officially recognised as a neglected tropical disease by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2017. It is caused by tiny mite and visible to the naked eye, and causes itchiness and sleep disturbance which is also associated with impaired school and work performance. So, we can see, Honourable Speaker, that despite the pathological effects that it can have on the child, causing medical issues such as damaged kidneys and damaged hearts from rheumatic heart disease and also contributing to a lesser quality of life when they grow up, these scabies also interfere with their normal schooling.

It is linked with skin sores, such as impetigo and abscesses and it is estimated that it is predominantly in low and middle income countries with an estimated 200 million people suffering from scabies worldwide. A national survey conducted in 2007 identified that it was highly prevalent in Fiji with the prevalence of 23.6 percent of the population. So, a quarter of the population in 2007 had scabies, Honourable Speaker.

The Northern Division had the highest prevalence of 28.5 percent. The prevalence was higher amongst children between 5 years to 9 years with figures up to 45 percent, so nearly half the children of 5 years to 9 years had scabies, Honourable Speaker, which makes them very vulnerable and also one in two children had scabies.

The research was conducted in Fiji and many other countries and the community-wide treatment with tablet called ivermectin, which is known to be a safe medication. It has been used for the control of other neglected tropical diseases for over 2 billion people.

In 2006, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in collaboration with the Australian Research Team from Murdoch Children's Research Institute commenced an in-depth study into the burden of the disease. This research demonstrated the high burden of scabies across Fiji, including reports that one in two children develop a new infestation of scabies every year.

In our effort to establish the best way to control and possibly eliminate scabies in Fiji, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, together with Murdoch Children's Research Institute and Kirby Institute at the University of New South Wales, Australia, commenced a series of studies to establish the most feasible solution for Fiji.

From September 2012 to September 2013, the Skin Health in Fiji Trial (SHIFT) was conducted in the maritime island communities namely; Moturiki, Batiki, Nairai, Dravuni, Buliya and Ono in Kadavu and it was to compare the three different available treatment regimens to identify the most effective one to reduce and control scabies, Honourable Speaker.

There are three different types of treatment regimens that can be used and we wanted to be sure what worked best for us in Fiji. These included the following:

1. Standard-of-Care of the provision of permethrin cream for 14 days;
2. Permethrin Cream for everyone with a follow-up treatment at seven days to 14 days;
3. Ivermectin tablet which was given to everyone and a second dose was given seven days to 14 days later.

All three intervention arms were followed up 12 months after to identify the prevalence of scabies through a skin examination to determine the most effective treatment.

Honourable Speaker, the result showed a decrease in scabies prevalence in all groups because they were all treated. However, the largest decrease was seen in that they took tablets called ivermectin. So, the cream caused a decrease in scabies but if someone took tablets, it was more prevalent or more increase. So, a decrease from 6 percent to 18 percent was seen in the standard-of-care group.

However in the ivermectin group, it decreased at a rate of staggering 94 percent. So, up to 94 percent of all those who had scabies in that who took tablets were completely healed of it when they did the review of 14 days to 21 days later.

Honourable Speaker, noting this, we then began what is called the “Big Shift Project” in the Northern Division with a population of 135,000 people, following the completion of the SHIFT project. In the Big Shift, our teams went out to the ground and took this tablet and tried to give it to every person in the Northern Division.

The mass drug administration for Big Shift took place from 1st July, 2019 to 11th August, 2019 in the Northern Division by using the tablet ivermectin and integrated with therapy for lymphatic filariasis which was also required in the Northern Division. During this period, Honourable Speaker, all health cadres of the Northern Health Service and Community Health Workers worked tirelessly, even after hours and in the weekends to ensure that everyone in the North had access to the treatment.

We appreciate the immense dedication and resilience they have shown to make this such a success. We would also like to acknowledge the support of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs in playing a vital role in spreading community awareness about the mass drug administration and allowing us to be able to reach nearly everyone in the Northern Division.

Honourable Speaker, in total, the mass drug administration for Big Shift delivered two doses of ivermectin-based mass drug administration. In dose one, they covered 135,744 Fijians in the Northern Division. Dose two covered 121,760 people in the Northern Division. Honourable Speaker, this is an immense success and we greatly acknowledge the achievement of our Northern Division Health Workforce and the Community Health Workers.

Honourable Speaker, we will be following this up with a study to see where the prevalence of scabies will be, but we now know from reports that are coming through that the level of scabies have dropped significantly in the Northern Division. Because it has dropped significantly, Honourable Speaker, we can be rest assured that our children in the Northern Division, much lesser will have rheumatic heart disease and much lesser also will have glomerulonephritis. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Health.

Civil Aviation Safety and Security Audit
(Question No. 17/2020)

HON. V. NATH asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the Safety and Security Audit of Fiji’s Civil Aviation which was conducted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Coordinated Validation Mission (ICVM) which was held in Fiji last year?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) which is the umbrella body in respect of aviation and all matters pertaining to safety and security, had a Coordinated Validation Mission during September 2019. In fact, it started on 27th August, 2019. The final report was just recently released on 13th January, 2020.

This particular Validation Mission, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a follow-up on the on-site activities to validate progress made by Fiji in resolving its safety and oversight deficiencies that were actually identified in the 2006 ICAO audit of the Fiji Civil Aviation system.

The objectives of the ICBM, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to assess and validate the status of the corrective actions or mitigating measures taken by the State following an audit. The ICBM conducted its audit in Fiji on seven of the eight critical areas of the Fijian Safety Oversight System. They included; Primary Aviation Legislation and Specific Operating Regulation, Civil Aviation Organisation, Personnel Licensing and Training, Aircraft Operations, Air Worthiness of Aircraft, Air Navigation Services and Aerodromes and Ground Aids.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the scope of the ICBM did not include the area of aircraft accident and incident investigation with the ICAO's technical expert and the subject matter is not available with ICBM. Of course, all stakeholders and all various service providers are related to this aviation industry in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the reviews conducted by the ICBM Team, Fiji's Effective Implementation (EI), the scores for the eight critical elements of the Safety Oversight System, increased, and I am very glad to say, from 61.36 percent in 2006 to 78.72 percent when it just got completed. The Report just came out in January this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a remarkable achievement for Fiji. It has improved by 16.64 percent and it shows our strong commitment and needs support of the Aviation Industry, to enhance the compliance to ICAO standards and, indeed, giving assurance to all stakeholders, including visitors and various other companies that use aviation services in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is now placed 11th in the Asia-Pacific Region consisting of 39 countries and third out of the 14 countries in the Oceania Region, only behind Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, we would probably soon catch up with them or even beat them very soon with a few legislative amendments we need to make.

Just to compare that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's overall year has scores higher than some of the major countries from the Asia-Pacific Region. We are higher than India which is 72.93, higher than Malaysia which is 74.97, higher than Thailand - 65.87, higher than Philippines - 70.52 percent, and Papua New Guinea, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the fact that Fiji has achieved this status, we now seem to play a pivotal role viz-a-viz all the other Pacific Island Countries just by comparison, for example. The score for Nauru is only 22.08, Tonga is 34.23 and Vanuatu is 49.24 and the others are, of course, on the same (sort of) range, so they have asked Fiji to assist these countries. Indeed, we are quite keen to assist our fellow brothers and sisters in the Pacific Region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also glad to announce that Fiji recently provided technical support to Tonga in the areas of Air Navigation Services and Aeronautical Maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, probably in the next session or the session after that, we will soon be providing some quick amendments and we will probably be using Standing Order 51 to do that because it will then help us to even further achieve the ICAO objective standards to get as much more robust standing as far as our scores are concerned.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is critically important for all of us to understand that better compliance for ICAO standards ensures that CAAF is effectively able to carry out its oversight responsibilities to ensure our airport operators, air navigation service providers and airline operators maintain a high level of aviation safety and security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I sit down, I would like to thank the dedicated professionals of CAAF and all other stakeholders, including our national airline involved with the ICBM, on an excellent work done to uplift our compliance to ICAO Standards and international best practices. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for that.

Honourable Members, we have come to the eighth Oral Question for today.

Climate Change Bill
(Question No. 19/2020)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications provide an update on the draft Climate Change Bill and the progress so far?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we intend to provide a very detailed information statement on the Climate Change Bill and, indeed, some of the key provisions but I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question because she is probably responding to the fairly long period of consultations we have had with members of the public over the past three months or so both, online and offline. We have received numerous submissions from the members of the public on the Climate Change Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I also talk about the way forward, climate change, of course, through our Honourable Prime Minister, in particular, through Conference of Parties (COP 23), has put climate change, not just internationally but also within Fiji, created an awareness about the impact, not just of climate change, but our necessity for us to become active and have long-term strategic thinking as to what we will do internationally and what we will do indeed domestically.

What we can do domestically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, is put in place various policy measures, whether it is about chlorofluorocarbons, whether it is about various other measures that we do take, viz-a-viz our environment, viz-a-viz our biodiversity, but also our commitment to reducing fossil fuels and focusing more on renewable energy, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Indeed, we have led from the front.

As the Honourable Prime Minister had said on a number of occasions that notwithstanding the fact that our carbon footprint is almost negligible internationally-speaking and comparatively speaking, that we need to lead from the front by showing an example of what other countries can do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through a robust legislation, we can introduce new tools and mechanisms to deal with emerging and unprecedented challenges brought about through climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having a National Climate Change Act will actually, in fact, mobilise a cross-sectorial response to climate change, improve our ability to understand it, plan for it, avert risks and help us to unlock new opportunities for our new private sector and increase our access to emerging carbon markets. We have talked about carbon trading and, indeed, this draft Climate Change Bill addresses those issues.

The implementation period of the Paris Agreement begins in 2020, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is why everyone is talking about the United Kingdom (UK) hosting COP 27. It is critically important and, therefore, we need to have the legal basis and structures required to progress our commitments in ways to commensurate with the urgency we face regarding climate change. It requires a dynamic legislative framework, one that helps us to protect both, people and environment and, indeed, deliver our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Mr. Speaker, Sir, while enabling all Fijians to benefit from opportunities that come hand-in-hand with low carbon transmission.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we hope, at a later stage, to give fuller details of the Bill itself but as it has been highlighted, the consultations that we have been having with the members of the public online, we have had enormous support in particular from the younger people.

A lot of people who were on the fringes were not actually commenting but when we put it out in particular, thorough social media and various other mediums, we have had tremendous support. We are currently in the stage of collating all those responses, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and some of those suggestions actually have been very useful and we are looking at inputting some of that into a further redraft of the Draft Bill. Then we will go out again to the members of the public by having some direct public consultations to fine-tune the Bill again.

We have already had responses from organisations, for example, iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB), the private sector, various other organisations, including the Fiji Navy, the private sector who want to take opportunities, vis-à-vis the Climate Change Bill and, of course, an understanding of carbon trading itself with enormous opportunity for us in carbon trading.

Once the redraft of the Draft Bill has been done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which we hope to finish by the end of March, we will then go out to the members of the public in April and then perhaps, do some more redrafting and table the Bill to this Parliament by the end of May, and we hope to have the Bill approved by Parliament because we have gone through such an extensive period of consultations. It should not linger in Parliament but, indeed, be something that we could launch, given our 50th Celebrations and that should be one of the hallmarks or milestones of us becoming a nation that is 50 years old now, with the launch of the Climate Change Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for that Statement.

Honourable Members, all those who were supposed to ask Written Questions are not present in the House and as for the Oral Questions and Written Questions, they all lapsed under Standing Order 45(6).

Honourable Members, I thank you for your contributions today and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow morning at 9.30. I hope at that time, we might have some company on the other side, but I will reserve my comments until the House is in order. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.42 p.m.