

**MONDAY, 26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2016**

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

HON. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> July and Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2016, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

New Session of Parliament

I welcome all Honourable Members to the first Parliament sitting for the 2016-2017 Session.

Acknowledgment of Students & Viewers

I also welcome students from the University of Fiji Saweni Campus in Lautoka and members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and internet, and listening in to the radio. I thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Matter of Privilege

For the information of Honourable Members, I received a notification on a matter of privilege, which I need time to consider before making a ruling on the same.

Tabling of Responses to Questions

Although not on the Order Paper, the Secretariat has received notifications from the Honourable Prime Minister, as well as the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, that they have written responses ready for tabling.

I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 45 (5), I hereby table my written response to Question No. 71/2016 by the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand your written responses to the Secretary-General.

(Written Responses handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management to table his responses.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 45 (5), I hereby table my written responses to Question No. 72/2016 by the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu and Question No. 112/2016 by the Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand your written responses to the Secretary-General.

(Written Responses handed to the Secretary-General)

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS**

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Prime Minister to table his Reports.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38 (1), I present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. The Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs 2015 Annual Report and the *iTaukei* Affairs Trust Fund Board 2015 Annual Report.

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

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the:

1. The Ministry of *i-Taukei* Affairs 2015 Annual Report and the *i-Taukei* Affairs Trust Fund Board 2015 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to table his Reports. For the information of the Honourable Members, although not in the Order Paper, the Secretariat received notice on Friday evening that he will also be tabling an Appropriation Statement as well as a Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2015 Annual Report..

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38 (1), I present to Parliament the following Reports:

- a. Appropriation Statement for the Period 01/04/2016 to 31/07/2016;
- b. Financial Intelligence Unit 2015 Annual Report;
- c. Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report 2015;
- d. Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption 2015 Annual Report; and
- e. Fiji Electricity Authority Annual Report - 2015.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the Statement and the Reports to the Secretary-General.

(Statement and Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the:

1. Appropriation Statement to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts;
2. Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2015 Annual Report , the Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report 2015 and the Fiji Electricity Authority Annual Report 2015 to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs; and
3. Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption 2015 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

I now call upon the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38 (1) I present to Parliament the University of the South Pacific 2015 Annual Report.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the University of the South Pacific 2015 Annual Report 2015 to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

I now call upon the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38 (1), I present to Parliament the Ministry of Youth and Sports Annual Report 2015.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Ministry of Youth and Sports Annual Report 2015 to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

### **PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Emoluments Committee.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, the Special Committee on Emoluments was formed by a Resolution of Parliament on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2016.

The motion was moved by the Government Whip and seconded by an Opposition Member and was passed as an unanimous resolution of Parliament.

The Committee was required to review the allowances of the Members of Parliament as provided for by the Parliamentary Remunerations Decree 2014 and the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

The Committee initiated its first meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2016 and collectively agreed to have submissions from all the respective parties, both the Government and the Opposition. The Committee subsequently received submissions from the FijiFirst, SODELPA (Socialist Democratic and Liberal Party) and the National Federation Party (NFP) respectively.

The Committee came to an agreement on the proposed review and this is attached to this Report as a Schedule.

I take this opportunity to make a few observations related to our recommendations.

Firstly, notwithstanding the submissions received, the Committee is not recommending any increase in salary, primarily because the nation is still recovering from the *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. What is proposed, however, is an adjustment to allowances, only to reflect the evolving roles of MPs in their various functions. We have seen the hardships faced by MPs thus far and these adjustments are necessary to ensure that they are given adequate support in the pursuit of their duties.

Secondly, I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the Honourable Members and the Secretariat Team who were actively involved with the production of this bipartisan report; my Committee colleagues Honourable Jone Usamate, Honourable Alvick Maharaj and Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

Finally, I also wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar who when called upon, participated as an Alternative Member, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5) during the Standing Committee meetings.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Madam Speaker, pursuant to the provisions of the Parliamentary Remunerations Decree 2014 and in accordance with Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move that a motion without notice, to initiate a debate on the contents of this report, as agreed to by the Business Committee on Thursday, 29 September, 2016.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **RESTORATION OF BILLS IN THE ORDER PAPER**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 97, I move that the following Bills be restored in the Order Paper:

- (1) Rotuma Bill 2015
- (2) Rotuma Lands Bill 2015
- (3) Meteorological Services and Hydrological Bill 2016
- (4) Land and Water Resources Management Bill 2016
- (5) Aquaculture Bill 2016
- (6) Heritage Bill 2016
- (7) Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2016
- (8) Forest Bill 2016
- (9) Fiji Inter-Change Network (Payments) Bill 2016
- (10) Reform of Sugar Cane Industry Bill 2016
- (11) Sugar Cane Growers Fund Bill 2016
- (12) Code of Conduct Bill 2016
- (13) Adoption Bill 2016
- (14) Public Order Amendment Bill 2016
- (15) Kava Bill 2016
- (16) Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Bill 2016
- (17) National Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill 2016
- (18) Community-Based Corrections Bill 2016
- (19) Information Bill 2016

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, this is a procedural motion as required under Standing Order 97(1) that:

“A Bill that lapses due to prorogation before it has been passed may proceed in the next session at the stage it had reached in the previous session by resolution of Parliament restoring the Bill to the Order Paper.”

As I have read out, Madam Speaker, there are 19 and they are important for our country, and I put the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- The House is now open for any comments, if any?

There being no comments, then I take it that the Leader of Government will now speak in reply. Would you like to speak in reply?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of noes)

The motion is therefore agreed to.

### **REFERRAL OF TREATIES TO COMMITTEES**

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

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence reviews the following Treaties:

- (1) World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement;
- (2) Protocol amending the WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement; and the
- (3) United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts 2005.

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

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

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

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

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

### **CONSIDERATION OF BILLS**

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

Madam Speaker, I have the two motions in respect of Bills on this Standing Order 51:

- (a) That the Customs Tariff Amendment No. 2 Bill 2016 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) That the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament; and
- (c) That the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament this afternoon and that 15 minutes be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

Madam Speaker, this Bill was alluded to in the Budget Statement earlier this year and this Bill reflects to amend the Customs Tariff Act, 1986 by simply changing the codes, in alignment with the World Customs Organisation.

Countries throughout the world, Madam Speaker, from 1<sup>st</sup> January next year will have the codes all aligned. This is the reason we had highlighted previously on a number of occasions that this code in Fiji also needs to be amended.

There is no change to any tariff rates and also there is no change in any other material aspects of the Customs Tariff Act. All it simply does is the adaptation and adoption of the actual codes for us and for Fiji in alignment with the rest of the world, where they will all have these codes come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January next year, Madam Speaker. This is why, in fact, there is nothing to debate per se but simply to ensure that Fiji is in alignment with the rest of the world.

Just by way of background, it talks about what we call the Harmonised System (HS). It is an universal economic language and code for goods and an indispensable tool for international trade, Madam Speaker.

It helps us to engage a lot more readily in matters related to trade and it also, Madam Speaker, these codes are periodically updated by the world's customs organisations, which is, we are a member of the WCO and therefore, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that these codes are in that same codes that the rest of the world uses. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The House is now open for debate on the motion and I invite input from any Honourable Member.

There being no further input, the Honourable Attorney-General, would you like to make any further comments?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and the Parliament will now vote and the question is:

- a) That the Customs Tariff Amendment Bill No. 2 2016 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) That the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament; and
- c) That the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament this afternoon but that 15 minutes be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Honourable Members oppose the motion?

(Chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- That motion is therefore agreed to. Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move that:

- (a) The Electronic Transactions Amendment Bill 2015 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) That the Bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights; and
- (c) That the Bill be debated and voted upon by Parliament in February 2017 sitting. The right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do we have a seconder?

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we have just earlier on referred to the Foreign Affairs Committee - the UN Convention on the use of Electronic Transactions for International Trade and Sale of International Contracts.

We need to have an accompanying law that will give effect to this Convention and we have referred this Convention to the Foreign Affairs Committee which will have approximately four to five months (about four months) to debate this and go for public consultations. It then gets referred back to Parliament in the February sitting. This is also once Parliament ratifies this, we need to immediately have a law in place to give effect to the Convention and in fact Fiji has been asked to ratify the Convention in February in New York for this particular Convention.

Madam Speaker, therefore, this particular Bill in fact is an amendment to an existing promulgation which is yet to come into effect. It seeks an amendment to the existing promulgation, which has actually been gazetted but in fact was not implemented or a commencement date was not given to that.

The reason, Madam Speaker, as to why we are seeking an amendment to it is because we would like this Electronic Transactions law to be on par with the international conventions overseas. It is no point ratifying a convention when your laws are not up to date – the domestic laws.

Madam Speaker, what this does is that it brings Fiji into the international forum in respect of electronic transactions. As we know, there are many forms of trade now that are taking place, for example, the internet. We have people, for example who are buying goods and indeed sometimes services on the internet. Now, in order for us to be able to have the appropriate laws: whether it is taxation; whether it is in terms of monitoring; whether it is in terms of foreign exchange rules that pertain to that; we need to have the appropriate laws.

It also, Madam Speaker, is critical for Fiji if it wants to participate equally and indeed as a modern country in respect of international trade that we actually adhere and ratify the conventions pertaining to the various aspects of international trade, and this of course, is one of them.

It does give a high level of confidence to those companies, those individuals who want to enter into transactions with Fijian companies and indeed Fijian individuals, as far as international trade is concerned. Therefore, it is very critical for us to have the legislative framework and indeed to be able to have the position to ratify this Convention, Madam Speaker.

Just by way of background, we recently hired an international consultant with the help of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), to look at the various laws and practices in Fiji and he in fact has provided a number of very valuable contributions and concentrations in fact have been held with the various agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji Police Force, the DPP's Office, Information Technology and Computer Services (ITC), the Judiciary, FRCA, the Financial Intelligence Unit and of course the Reserve Bank of Fiji and other related Government Ministries.

Madam Speaker, the idea is that we provide an open transparent system. We give a number of incentives for electronic transactions as far as international trade is concerned and when the Committee, of course will have, as we have highlighted earlier on the ability to also seek public consultations in the next four months or so and to be able to then present its findings on the



Amendment Bill to this Parliament, we can then of course debate on it together with the Report that will come across to Parliament from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is now open for debate. Is there any input? Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications and International Contracts is an important one and obviously in an environment where we are now looking at are E-Commerce and E-Business, I think is an important Convention for us to look at.

I am just wondering whether bringing the Bill and the Convention together is the right way to go because I think before we consider the Bills as part of the adoption of the Convention itself, there would be of course various questions with respect to becoming party to the Convention. Questions like, what sort of financial implications we will have in the administration at the domestic level and whether we would require a dedicated body, set up to look at how the implementation of the laws that will follow the Convention?

Maybe these are some of the questions that the Committee which is going to look at the Convention itself should come out first before we actually look at the law and the Bill itself. It may be that there are no financial implications, I do not know, but those are obvious questions that we will need to ask when we look at the Convention and the laws that we will adopt in support of their conventions, to ensure that the convention is implemented fully. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The floor is still open for any further comments. There being none, I will now invite the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, there is nothing untoward about having a Convention being referred to the Committee, which is the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I would assume that this Bill be referred to the Economic Affairs Committee and they will be looking at this. So both of them obviously can simultaneously do their work.

With those people who are familiar with UNCITRAL's work and the model law that has been adopted, you will see it is more to do, Madam Speaker, with how to ensure that the uniformity across borders in respect of, for example, Madam Speaker, as the Bill talks about, such as electronic signatures. How will that be used? How will, for example, the Convention apply and when will it kick in? What for example is deemed to be the time of receipt of the actual transaction itself? Of course, once you ratify that Convention, that in itself does not create the obligation nor does it necessarily give the transacting party from outside Fiji the particular level of comfort that we had actually domestic laws that actually will ensure that we are adhering to the provisions of the Convention.

In respect to the actual financial implications, there is none per se in a material manner to the State but it is more to do with the individuals who carry on businesses in Fiji either with the Government or the private sector. I think it is obviously an efficient way that Parliament will also be working, that we will be able to deal with both the matters and it will also augur well for Fiji that when you ratify the Convention you actually will say that we have the laws in place. I think that carries a lot of manna, it carries a lot of weight when you go off to international gathering and you ratify particular convention that you actually have the law in place to give effect to the convention because sometimes we found previously in Fiji, we may have ratified something but in fact the laws have kicked-in long time after that which, in a way, nullifies your ratification of the convention.

The idea is that we need to take advantage of the fact that economically we are doing well, the fact that there is a lot of international interest in Fiji, a lot of international interest in trading with Fiji, so the sooner we have this law in place, the sooner we ratify the Convention, then we will be able to get a lot more business, a lot more trade with the outside world which actually will be ultimately for the benefit of the ordinary Fijians. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

The question is, pursuant to Standing Order 51 –

- a) That the Electronic Transactions (Amendment) Bill 2016 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) That the Bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights; and
- c) That the Bill be debated and voted upon by Parliament in the February 2017 sitting, with the letter of right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Now I call on the Honourable Prime Minister to move his motion.

### **DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY'S ADDRESS**

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister to have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to acknowledge and commend His Excellency the President for his Address on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2016, formally opening the 2016 Session of Parliament.

In his Speech, His Excellency referred to the disproportionate role that Fiji is taking in drawing global attention to the urgent need to confront the challenges of climate change. But, Madam Speaker, this is only the most prominent aspect of Fiji's international engagement across a broad front. In that respect, I have spent the past week in New York at the United Nations General Assembly, playing a key role in global frameworks and agreements that Fiji has, in many ways, helped to influence.

As you know, Madam Speaker, Fiji has assumed the Presidency of the General Assembly for the first time under Ambassador Peter Thomson and it was a very proud moment for our nation and the other Pacific Island countries.

In my address to the General Assembly, I highlighted the urgent need for a more radical response by the international community to deal with the effects of climate change. And in particular, the extreme weather events like *Tropical Cyclone Winston*, that I said had given Fijians a terrifying glimpse into the future that awaits us all because of global warming.

Madam Speaker, we are facing the prospect of more frequent and more intense cyclones like *Winston*, that have the potential to kill many more of our people, and wipe out our economy in the event of direct hit. And Pacific Island nations are pressing the global community to put a cap of 1.5 degrees on global warming over the pre-industrial age, rather than the 2 percent agreed to under the Paris Agreement of last November.

Madam Speaker, I also stressed to the other 192 members countries of the UN the importance of the high level Conference of Oceans and Seas that Fiji is co-sponsoring with Sweden in New York next June. We must reverse the current threat to our seas posed by pollution, over-fishing and the loss of marine habitats. And we must do it as a matter of urgency for the sake of our coastal communities in Fiji and around the world that depend on the sea for their food and their livelihoods.

Madam Speaker, as well as addressing the UN General Assembly, I also spoke at a side meeting of the Commonwealth at special sessions relating to the Oceans Conference, the flow of refugees and migrants and climate change.

Madam Speaker, along with the American Secretary of State, John Kerry, I was one of only two world leaders to address a UN special event, encouraging other nations to ratify the Paris Agreement. Fiji, as you know, was the first country in the world to ratify the Agreement and lodge the ratification instruments, and we are taking the lead in the effort to get other nations to do the same so that the Agreement can finally come into effect. And we can all begin to make the significant cuts in carbon emissions that are needed to avert the crisis we are facing.

Madam Speaker, in addition to these events, I also had formal meetings with the UN Secretary General, the Australian Prime Minister, the British Minister responsible for the Asia-Pacific, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and the Leaders and foreign Ministers of other countries, including Indonesia, Guyana, Hungary and Ethiopia. I also had formal meetings with the foreign ministers of Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, Barbados and, of course, my fellow Pacific Island Leaders.

Never before has Fiji's voice been heard so strongly in the world. Never before has that voice been so respected and we continue to punch above our weight in global affairs; whether it is through our contribution to UN Peacekeeping or our lead role in the fight against climate change, and it is something every Fijian can be proud of.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President also emphasised national unity and his appeal for Honourable Members to behave with honour, was most welcome. "Let us all be worthy in public life of the ordinary men and women who have put us here and given us their trust", he said. "Let us set an example in this Parliament for young Fijians, who look to us to build a future worthy of their dreams and aspirations because it is by setting a standard of excellence here that we can inspire them to excellence and be powerful role models in the quest to make Fiji great."

With that statement, Madam Speaker, His Excellency reminded us all of our most important obligation as elected representative of the Fijian people, which is to set an example for young Fijians of the highest standards of conduct in public life.

They were inspiring words on a day of inspiration that included our Head of State acknowledging Naomi Lewakita, the 11 years old girl from the Fiji School for the Blind, who had inspired us all on Constitution Day when she read out the rights of the disabled from the braille version of our Constitution.

Many of you were also present at State House in the evening where, to the surprise of everyone, Naomi sang to us all. It was very moving to hear the voice of a girl, who is refusing to allow her disability to hold her back. We could all feel Naomi's spirit soar as she sang and our spirits soared with her.

Madam Speaker, these are the moments that inspire me to redouble my efforts to improve the opportunities for young people like Naomi. She told the media that being here with us in Parliament made her think that one day, she might be able to make a contribution to public life, and I am certain that she will.

Madam Speaker, it was a powerful reminder of the trust our children are placing in us to build a better world; a world of opportunity in which we take everyone with us on our journey forward. And it was a powerful reminder of the sacred duty we owe our young people to uphold their trust and do everything we can to serve them, and to provide them with the opportunities they deserve.

Madam Speaker, as His Excellency the President said in his Speech, he has big shoes to fill as Head of State. His predecessor, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, is a tough act to follow - soldier, statesman, diplomat and HIV AIDS campaigner, a man of high status and great accomplishments who has never lost his common touch and empathy with the people.

Following Ratu Epeli's footsteps was always going to be a challenge for anyone, yet His Excellency, Major-General Jioji Konrote not only filled those shoes when he came here two weeks ago, he wore them with distinction. Our Head of State, fulfilling his ceremonial duties with dignity, authority and wisdom. As a soldier and military hero - the holder of one of the highest awards for gallantry, the Military Cross, Major-General Konrote is known to be tough and decisive.

As a former diplomat and Government Minister, he is known for his ability to bring people together. He is a man of strong religious faith. His Excellency is known to be compassionate, especially towards the most vulnerable. As a leader who is comfortable in the presence of young people, His Excellency knows that it is their future that matters most of all. And as the first non-*Taukei* ever to hold the office of the President of the Republic of Fiji, he is the symbol of our strength in diversity and the fact that we all belong and we are all Fijians.

So it is a great shame, Madam Speaker, that one of the opposition parties was not present to hear His Excellency's words of wisdom, not the least because they might have learned something. The decision by the National Federation Party (NFP) to boycott the opening session of the Parliament was an insult to our Head of State, an insult to this Parliament and an insult to the nation. It came on top of the NFP, refusing to attend the Constitution Day celebration. The Honourable Leader of the NFP told Pacific Beat Programme on *Radio Australia* that Fiji's Constitution Day was a sham. But, Madam Speaker, tell that to Naomi Lewakita and the other young people, who took part in this occasion and read extracts from the Constitution with such feeling.

Madam Speaker, the opening of a session of Parliament is no ordinary session. It is a State occasion, a non-political event. It is our Head of State reminding us that whatever our political differences, there is a higher cause which is our duty to our nation to act in the best interest of every Fijian. It is the duty of every selected representative of Parliament to be present. Yet, rather than take their places for their solemn occasion, the NFP chose to stage a cheap political stunt in this opening session, in a deliberate snub to His Excellency the President, the Head of the Fijian State, our Parliament and the Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, I noticed the NFP Leader giving an interview in which he questioned the legitimacy of our Constitution and described our democracy as a sham. No, Honourable Leader, it is the leadership of your Party that is the sham. He happily stood for the 2014 Election under the

terms of the Constitution he now rejects because he undoubtedly thought he could win and form Government. But having lost, he turned on the very document that brought him here like a child, who wants the rules of a game changed after it has finished. He had every opportunity, Madam Speaker, at the last Election to win over the electorate. Twenty nations declared that Election, a free and legitimate expression of the will of the people. And what did he get? A mere three seats out of 50. The people spoke but he still cannot get over that decision and ever since then, they have been very poor losers, displaying no respect at all for the will of the people and no respect for our institutions.

Madam Speaker, it is not our democracy that is a sham, nor our Constitution. The real sham is the once great National Federation Party. The Party of such great figures in the Fijian history, such as A.D. Patel and Siddiq Koya now reduced to a grumpy rump and crying foul because the Fijian people do not share the high opinion its members have for their supposed brilliance. A party that displays contempt for our Head of State and contempt for our democracy.

Madam Speaker, let me turn to another part of His Excellency the President's Address when he evoked the words of his predecessor and said this, I quote:

“ Let us promote unity rather than division. To think beyond parochial interest of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status or where we come from in Fiji and not to peddle false information to create fear among ordinary people.”

In this context, Madam Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the House to an observed claim made recently by the NFP President and suspended member, the Honourable Tupou Draunidalo. I almost fell off my chair when I heard her say that the *iTaukei* are disadvantaged in Fiji and I almost fell through the floor when I heard her plead with the Indo-Fijians to support the *iTaukei* to reverse the supposed disadvantage and get FijiFirst out of Government.

Madam Speaker, what disadvantage? There is none, and it is astonishing that an educated person like the suspended member, a lawyer as well as President of the NFP, could make such an outrageous claim, astonishing and irresponsible because the Honourable Member is doing precisely what His Excellency the President appealed to us not to do, to peddle false information and create fear among ordinary people. There is no justification, whatsoever for her statement and fortunately, the days when such an outrageous claim takes hold and becomes widely accepted are over.

The overwhelming majority of *iTaukei* are far too smart to be swayed by this crude scare mongering. They know the Honourable Member is not telling the truth because they can see for themselves all around them that their position has never been stronger. They know they have ownership of 91 percent of the land in Fiji, and that ownership is guaranteed in perpetuity by our Constitution which also guarantees the protection of *iTaukei* customs and traditions.

They know that more *iTaukei* young people than ever before are benefiting from our education revolution, whether it is the free schooling that this Government is providing for the first time or the tertiary loans and scholarships that are enabling all Fijians to get a higher education in our universities and technical colleges. They know that more *iTaukei* than ever before have access to health care, water, electricity and our first pensions. They know that more *iTaukei* than ever before have good and sustainable jobs because we are managing the economy better than ever before and are in our seventh straight year of economic expansion.

Madam Speaker, why is the President of NFP peddling this false information, trying to create fear among ordinary *iTaukei* when there is no cost to fear anything at all? There is only one possible answer given the complete lack of evidence to support her claim because she thinks the *iTaukei* are stupid. She insults their intelligence, just as her Party insults our democratic institutions and our

Head of State, Madam Speaker let me inform the Nation, that the truth and it is what Fiji's representative to the United Nations in Geneva told the 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council about the rights of our indigenous people in a statement six days ago and I quote:

“Fiji is privileged that its indigenous - the *iTaukei* are well protected under the Constitution. Our Constitution Preamble acknowledges at the outset, the unique position they hold in Fiji. Fiji is acutely aware that the *iTaukei* culture is unique to Fiji and is the foundation stone of the survival and growth of our Indigenous community. Land is especially protected with 91 percent of Fiji's land being held in trust for the indigenous population. The rights of children, the right to health, education, housing, water and sanitation, the rights of persons with disabilities, are all guaranteed in our Constitution, together with the right to economic participation and right to work with a just minimum wage. Fijian citizens under our Constitution enjoy the right to a clean and healthy environment. All these rights are protected for all persons regardless of ethnicity.”

Madam Speaker, I repeat: the *iTaukei* are not disadvantaged in any way at all, and to say otherwise is a lie. The rights of the *iTaukei* are guaranteed in the Constitution more than ever before, for all time, and at the same time it upholds the rights of all Fijians on our fundamental premise of all democracies, which is equality of opportunity. Of everyone being taken on our journey forward in the spirit of unity and inclusion.

Madam Speaker, let me be very clear about the differences of opinion on this issue between those of us in this side or and that side of the House and those opposite. Those opposite in SODELPA and their suspended fellow traveller - the President of the NFP, believe that the *iTaukei* should be given special advantages, special privileges, over other citizens. Whereas we, this side of the House and that side of the House, believe in the concept of universal advantage - of every Fijian getting the best possible level of service and assistance the Government can afford, irrespective of who you are or where you come from in Fiji. And on the basis of need, with the most help going to the most vulnerable: low income earners, the disabled, the elderly, the sick, our women and our children.

Let me again read from the submission to the Human Rights Council, because it goes to the heart of what we believe in over here as opposed to what they believe in over there, and I quote:

“Indigenous rights cannot be used to justify monopoly over power. Nor must indigenous rights be used to create a community of privilege, which survives only out of a sense of entitlement. Fiji does not want a society made up of the “creamy layer” of privilege based on birth. Poverty and disadvantage, in Fiji's experience cut cross all ethnic and cultural groups. They must be defeated by free and equal access to education and by the creation of meritocracy which rewards performance, and ability.”

Madam Speaker, that is the new Fiji and there is no turning back. Not because the Government says so, but it is the will of the Fijian people. Freely expressed at the last Elections and enshrined in the Constitution on which the Elections was held and that the people also endorsed.

I appeal to those opposite to heed the words of His Excellency the President about the need to promote unity rather than division. I specially appeal to those individuals - and you know who you are - who use every opportunity to show ethnic and religious divisions, because the nation is watching and is no longer in any mood to tolerate your behaviour.

Madam Speaker, a wonderful thing has happened since we last gathered in ordinary session. Our Rugby Sevens Gold Medal win *Rio* has united us as a nation as never before and it has fired our imaginations about what is possible for a small nation that think big. Whether it is on the rugby field, taking our Fijian Made brand of goods and services to the world or leading the fight against climate change.

In my extensive travels throughout Fiji, which I will continue to do (Sorry, Honourable Biman Prasad, I get to meet ordinary Fijians and sit down and discuss their everyday opportunities and challenges), and I can tell you one thing, Madam Speaker, they are not interested in petty arguments or political point scoring. They are interested in service delivery overall. They talk about their needs, their wants, their demands and about where service delivery can improve. They are not interested in unscrupulous politicians who try and create divisions, for their short-term political gain. They want competent service delivery. They want long-term security, stability and sound economic development. They want to be connected and they want to be involved to be the beneficiaries of our nation's progress.

As His Excellency the President said in his powerful message to us all:

“The nation calls on you to do all you can to harness the spirit of our Olympic win. To tap the wonderful sense of unity that has descended on our beloved Fiji. To leave aside petty squabbles, rivalries, division and grandstanding and personal and political gain. To use this Parliament as a force to propel us forward to the greatness we glimpsed in *Rio*. And which with the Almighty Gods help, will be our nation's future.”

Madam Speaker, I commend these words to the House and thank His Excellency for his wisdom and guidance. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank you for allowing me to speak as I need to leave today for overseas.

Madam Speaker, we would like to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, for his most gracious words to this Parliament, and we would like to also in that light make a few short comments in respect of some of the key areas that he had highlighted. I would like to focus predominately on the economic aspect, Madam Speaker, of what His Excellency the President talked about. Linked in, of course Madam Speaker, the Economy, one has to talk to about the effects of *Cyclone Winston*. As we know and His Excellency talked about the massive impact *Cyclone Winston* had on the Fijian people some months back. We lost 44 lives, we had vast tracks of area in Fiji, in particular North West of Viti Levu, Ovalau, Koro, Vanua Balavu, parts of Taveuni and Southern parts of Vanua Levu that were affected by *Cyclone Winston*.

In response to that, Madam Speaker, there is a massive logistical exercise that had to be embarked upon. The Honourable Minister for National Disaster Management and his team were on the ground immediately.

We also had the assistance of our neighbours; in particular Australia and New Zealand that provided a lot of logistical support that obviously could not have been carried out without their support and equipment that they have and we thank all the other countries that came to our assistance.

Madam Speaker, it also meant that the Fijian Government had to be creative in respect of the massive damage that was carried out and Government embarked on an \$88 million “Help for Homes” initiative.

It also puts in place an unprecedented initiative in working with the private sector, Madam Speaker, and the Fiji Institution of Engineers, we would like to publicly thank them for that, for

coming to our assistance by way of providing detailed assessments, in particular the schools and the public buildings that were damaged. And today, we have been applauded for this internationally, the fact is that if you go to the [www.adoptschoolprogramme](http://www.adoptschoolprogramme) website, you will find detailed records, drawings, submissions, cost base of all these individual schools and how they can be picked up and what type of materials are required.

So, Madam Speaker, the reality is that, given the climatic events that are taking place, as the Honourable Prime Minister highlighted, the frequency of these events will now become a lot more common. The intensity of these climatic events will be further heightened, given climate change in the world. And of course we will be bearing the brunt of it, notwithstanding the fact that we have one of the lowest harbour markets in the world.

Reality, Madam Speaker, is that we need to be able to do back better. As was highlighted on the weekend, we have had a massive logistical exercise. We have engaged people who can do back better. Nine schools were given tender scores on the weekend. We have another 43 coming up in the next one week and by the end of November, all the schools that were damaged, construction was to start on those sites, but, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, we are simply not taking the hammer and nail and corrugated tin and just simply hammering it back on. All these schools will actually have a blueprint. All of them will have drawings. All of them have been structurally assessed and we will be building back better is as we know, Madam Speaker, that most of the schools in fact are also used as evacuation centres.

So, the idea is to get the best return from the value on the dollar that they are putting into the schools.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We could obviously have done (and I wish the Honourable Member would stop interjecting. Madam Speaker) had built back simply just to show a facade and put up a roof and then it get blown away by a cyclone one or two category wind that could come along.

The idea, Madam Speaker, is that we are focussed on those schools that have in fact been the most damaged, they will be given first priority and the reality is that, most schools as we know, rural and community schools, there are numerous buildings that may exist in one particular school. So, you could have for example, 10 to 15 individual buildings for classes one, two and three.

What we are doing, Madam Speaker, in many instances is rather than doing exactly the same type of set up, we may be building only one big building and have about six or ten classrooms with only one roof and you get upstairs and a downstairs. That obviously is the smarter way of doing things. It requires intellect, it requires the best advice that we can get from people who are best in the business.

Madam Speaker, that obviously is a major effort, as announced in the Budget, I will be spending in the chest of \$130 million regarding that.

Madam Speaker, I think what is also important to note that notwithstanding the massive damage by *TC Winston*, our growth rate will still be buoyant. There is no doubt it has been downgraded in excess of three percent. There are institutions that are saying, and we understand the Reserve Bank of Fiji has now said that it will be in excess 2.5 percent. Initially, it was more than three percent prior to the cyclone and that obviously is good news, Madam Speaker.



We will similarly have seen because of the 'Help for Homes' initiative and you knew the massive construction work is going on in the private sector that there have been issues pertaining to hardware materials, Government has zero-rated duty and all importation of those critical hardware materials and we have deleted, there is subtraction now.

The New Zealand and Australian Governments have taken the responsibility and they want to do that. In Vanua Balavu, they are building all the schools and the Australians are building schools in Koro. We also understand that they have not started as yet because they are similarly going through a similar exercise that we are going through to be able to build back better.

Madam Speaker, I think the fundamental issue that we also need to address His Excellency the President has spoken about and that is to ensure that we have very strong foundations of our economy. Strong foundations in the economy means that we need to build confidence. In order to build confidence, Madam Speaker, we need to ensure, for example, we have the appropriate laws in place. We need to ensure that the appropriate conventions are ratified. We need to ensure that the appropriate processes are in place, to be able to give people the confidence not just for foreigners but also domestic investors.

This requires, Madam Speaker, a national approach. Irrespective of political differences, I think all of us in this House in agreement that every Fijian wants to economically progress but as we know has been receiving the political landscape. We have for decades being so swept away by scoring cheap political size, whichever Government has been in place, whichever Opposition has been in place, that we are not focussed on the economy, we are not focussed on service delivery. We are focussed on, as the Honourable Prime Minister highlighted, some political parties, unlike this political party, in terms of talking about divisions, in terms of not talking about merit-based appointments, in terms of not saying about what is critical for the confidence building for our economy, Madam Speaker, and that is very, very important.

Today in Fiji, Madam Speaker, we have more sim cards in operation than the actual number of Fijians. Of course we know some people carry more than one phone, having more than one sim card. Some people obviously have the necessity to do that, others do not, but the reality is that, nearly 95 percent of Fijians now have access to a mobile network coverage, Madam Speaker.

This is a very powerful message. We have got a liberalised telecommunication sector. Government is working very hard to be able to get connectivity to people, whether in the outer parts of Kadavu, whether in Lau, whether they are in Northern Yasawas, we need everyone connected. So, connectivity, Madam Speaker, and to build that confidence to get the private sector to build infrastructure and it requires Government also to work together with them to connect everyone but connecting everyone by way of an example, we are able to empower them. We are able to give them access to MPAiSA or whatever other form of electronic transactions. We are able to get them to have access to business. The cost of business is reduced Madam Speaker.

So all of these should be the agenda for everyone in this House, irrespective of who we are. We are all Fijians, we want them to be connected. We want them to be able to have good reception. We want our children who maybe in Southern Lau, to be able to access the type of educational materials that people who live in the Suva-Nausori corridor have access too. That Madam Speaker, is empowerment. That is what we must be focussed on.

So when we have Bills in this House, when we are having discussions on those types of topics, Madam Speaker, we hope that everyone in this House is able to talk positively about that and we all have a fundamental and like His Excellency highlighted a responsibility, irrespective of the political parties we belong to. A responsibility to ensure that all Fijians get those services as the Honourable Prime Minister highlighted, he said that we need to be focussed on service delivery.

Madam Speaker, the other aspect of course is that, nearly 70 percent of our population are below the age of 40. These people, Madam Speaker, they are the firepower of our country. They are the people with the new ideas. They are the people who we need to give access to education, to information and to technology. They are the people who create business. They are the people who will give us creative thinking, Madam Speaker.

I was fortunate enough to be at USP on Saturday morning last weekend to witness a group of people who were competing in a Microsoft-led, a programming and coding competition. You could see, Madam Speaker, how geared up they were and our focus really should be to harness that energy. Our focus should be, to say to them "that all of you when you come into the marketplace, you can compete equally. If you perform well, you do well. You will be rewarded well. If you join the Civil Service you will be appointed on merit. Your promotion will be on merit. If you join the Sciences, we have shortage of people in sciences you will be given scholarships."

The Honourable Minister for Health has now, with the good work done by her predecessor, we have now focussed more attention, salaries of doctors have been increased.

We are currently, Madam Speaker, looking at other areas of the Civil Service, where the salaries will also be increased. We carried out a proper management and assessment of the salaries that are being put in place and what needs to be done.

Madam Speaker, the reality though is, is not just only about money. It is also about having specific career paths and ensuring that they are acknowledged for what they are doing and people need to have confidence within the system.

Madam Speaker, all of these are something that should be dear to every single Member in this House, irrespective whichever side of the House you sit on.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of initiatives led by the Honourable Prime Minister in the international fora that is taking place, that is giving Fiji a lot of credibility. They like to focus on the economic side than the electronic side of it.

Fiji, only recently through the Reserve Bank of Fiji, hosted the Alliance for Financial Inclusion. There were 500 attendees who went to Sheraton. We have people from African, the Caribbean, the Asian countries and even from Europe and the Pacific Region, who participated and they all said that never before had they had such a successful conference or gathering of the Alliance and Financial Inclusion. That was then followed by the Commonwealth Telecommunication Organisation Conference. We again have people from all these different countries. We are again the nomination for Fiji to become the first Vice-Chair of the CTO executive was also put and approved.

Madam Speaker, interestingly enough, as the Honourable Prime Minister have lobbied in Papua New Guinea, in the ACP meetings for the Presidency for the United Nations General Assembly Presidency, the Africans again unanimously supported Fiji to become the first Vice-Chair, this means automatically, Madam Speaker, in a year's time, Fiji for the first time will become the Chair of the CTO, but, Madam Speaker, all of this is done, not because it just simply happens, it is because it is the international recognition of the changes that are taking place. It is a recognition of the fact that there are many processes, laws, policies, ratification of conventions that are putting Fiji on the agenda and for a country that is so small, we are not even a million people, smack in the middle of the Southern Pacific, we are getting this international recognition.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, Fiji of course has been, in respect of the G77 participation, has led to a number of alliances in terms of our development partners working together with us. We now

have a better South-South Cooperation. We will also be, like we are talking for example with the Australians to have a unified approach to aid assistance. Ultimately, our goal is, that one day we do not need aid. We do not want to be dependent on aid and I have to very quickly also quantify that by saying “we are one of the lowest recipients of aid in the Southern Pacific. There are certain Pacific island countries, where nearly 85-90 percent of their entire budgets are driven by aid, whereas ours is about five percent.

Now, Madam Speaker, the reality is that, if we all work together, if we have our development partners complement Government initiatives, we will be able to get off the aid train a lot quicker. We will be able to have lot more independence and as a country, always as Fijians, we need to make sure that we work towards that and that is very, very critical, Madam Speaker.

So again, I appeal to all Members in the House to support His Excellency's statement, to support what the Honourable Prime Minister has talked about. How we need to position Fiji - regionally and globally and that is very, very important.

In respect to international recognition, the Honourable Prime Minister later on in the month of October will be opening a workshop that will have been led by the UN in respect of the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Torture. Fiji is being used as a case study as what processes to follow to be able to ratify that convention and the Honourable Prime Minister is speaking on that, Madam Speaker.

Now, Madam Speaker, there is nothing better than getting a third party validation of what is happening in our country. There is nothing better than getting a third party validation and that is precisely what is happening in the international forum and that is precisely what is happening in the regional forum, Madam Speaker, and that is something that all of us, including people on the other side of House need to be proud of that we, in Fiji, are getting that recognition.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is not shameful to get international recognition, Honourable Karavaki. It is in fact a proud thing for us to get international recognition for that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is very sad to say that it is shameful.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I would also like to highlight how all of us as Fijians need to ensure and I would like to come back again to His Excellency the President's Address and what the Honourable Prime Minister said today:

“Please, we appeal to everybody, please do not try to undermine the economy, simply to gain some sort of cheap political points.”

I will give you a very classic example. The Honourable Members on the other side of the House, in particular the Opposition spokesperson on that, for the past 18 months have been berating us for paying too much money to consultants of (FRA - paying too much money. “You should not use consultants, we are paying too much money.” When the FRA's Board questioned invoices by MWH to say that “you justify these claims”, they are on *Radio New Zealand*, *Radio Australia*, berating the Government, saying “Oh, MWH is going to leave! There will be lack of confidence, we

should pay the invoice.” Why should we pay the invoice? Every international company that comes into Fiji ....

(Chorus of Interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Listen! Listen! I know you like *TV* interviews with *Fiji One*. Just listen! The point of the merit, Madam Speaker, that here we have a board of FRA. Madam Speaker, we have the FRA Board questioning an invoice, asking the supplier of the services to justify the claim. When that supplier refuses the justification of the invoice that have raised, it is critical that they provide that. You do not understand anything. Madam Speaker, can I stop?

(Chorus of Interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The man who defended foreigners in terms of owning land in Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order! Please allow the Honourable Attorney General to continue and we give you three extra minutes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker. You see, Madam Speaker, this is the hypocrisy and the contradiction that exists.

A few months ago, they talked about “we are paying too much to consultants when the FRA Board is going through the motions and questioning them, they suddenly are defending WMH. Madam Speaker, this is the kind of contradiction that takes place.

We have the Honourable Leader for NFP, giving an interview because *Fiji Times* wants to run an article ...

(Chorus of interjections)

... to say that the price of goods in Fiji or inflation for one particular month has gone up because of yaqona, because of cigarettes and because of alcohol. That is the level of contribution they have. Everybody knows, Madam Speaker, that the price of yaqona went up. The duties of alcohol and cigarettes went up. Madam Speaker, you do not comment on a month-to-month basis.

(Chorus of interjections)

My point is, Madam Speaker, my point is this, that we have a responsibility as His Excellency the President stated in this Parliament, to be able to become apolitical about issues that affect the future of our country.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We need to become apolitical about that. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, in Parliaments, not in this Parliament, but previous Parliaments, the focus of becoming apolitical as never extended to the economic arm. We must all be focused, Madam Speaker, to ensure that we improve the foundations of our economy.

Imagine, Madam Speaker, if *Tropical Cyclone Winston* went through Suva, went through the middle of Viti Levu, swept through Nadi and wiped off our cruise and industries, wiped off our manufacturing sector. That, Madam Speaker, would show the vulnerability. How vulnerable we are

as an economy that we can have one climatic event that could set us back decades? We were fortunate enough by the grace of God that that did not happen.

(Chorus of Interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Of course it can happen. Therefore, as exactly my point. The point is, we need to embed our economic foundations and all of us need to be focused on embedding our economic foundations. It is not a laughing matter, Madam Speaker. It is a very serious matter and I hope this Honourable House, Madam Speaker, and the Members, in particular on the other side will focus on ensuring that a very strong economic foundation and that, not by playing cheap politics.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. You all know that I did give the Honourable Attorney-General a few minutes to round off his presentation because of the time taken through the interjections that were made but that will not be the precedent in this week's debate.

Thank you Honourable Members. We will now suspend this sitting so that we can have some refreshments and we will return at 11.30 a.m. Parliament is suspended.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.54 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.31 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off and I now give the floor to the Honourable Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forests.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of the House, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; good morning, *salaam alaykum, ramram, ni sa bula vinaka*.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Forests fully supports the statement made by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji when he opened the Parliamentary Session on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2016; encouraging us to reflect on our performance at the halfway point, and continue to challenge the status quo as it sets the direction for continuous improvement while driving the nation towards the Government's overall vision of "A Better Fiji for All".

Madam Speaker, please allow me from the outset to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his visionary leadership. This is the first time ever in the history of this nation to recognise the importance of having the Department of Forests become a ministry on its own.

This decision is very timely and will surely lift the status of the forest sector to another level in assisting its stakeholders, resource owners and the community as a whole, with specific focus and undivided attention on building a much more robust and sustainable forest sector that is more able to face the challenges of tomorrow.

The forest resource is one of its kind that can bring wealth to the nation. This is the start of a new beginning, a new parliamentary era, a new forest administration and Fijians now have a new foundation for building strong partnership for prosperity within the forest sector.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is committed to Fiji's national development programme focussing on enhancing economic growth, capitalising on emerging opportunities and effective service delivery to our stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has a crucial responsibility for ensuring the sustainability of the 1.1 hectares of Fiji's forests for social, economic and environmental purposes.

In the past two years, the forest sector has earned around \$156 million in export earnings of which, around 52 percent are from pine chips and 48 percent accounts for sawn timber and various types of timber value-added products.

Furthermore, a study in 2007 indicated that forests contribute to approximately over \$543 million annually in terms of ecosystem services. Government has demonstrated its commitment to protecting Fiji's forests with its ecosystem services through the preservation and protection of reserves and conservation areas throughout Fiji.

Madam Speaker, in the new financial year, the Ministry has allocated an annual budget of \$11.4 million for the implementation of its planned activities, which includes supporting the current Government efforts in rebuilding Fiji due to *Tropical Cyclone Winston*.

Furthermore, the Ministry will continue to put in place a legal framework which is much more transparent, conducive to current social and economic environment, enforces sustainability,

generates trust and confidence, create a more level playing field for investors and forest industries, supports livelihoods, alleviate poverty and builds wealth for resource owners and rural communities.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to reflect on some of the major achievements and review the overall performance of the forest sector for the past two years.

In terms of broadening the economic base for the forest sector, firstly, we are now capitalising on the current opportunity for the funding of our forest protection activities under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Basically, this activity will generate a stream of funds to pay for the protection of our natural forests. Fiji in this regard has secured US\$3.8 million from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) to support our RED+ Readiness Programme with co-funding support from the German Technical Co-operation. The main activities in this Programme are institutional strengthening and the development of the National RED+ Strategic Action Plan. In addition, Fiji has secured itself a place with the FCPF Carbon Fund Pipeline, for the phase of funding.

Madam Speaker, a successful joint venture between Tropik Woods Industries Ltd. and GIMCO has seen the establishment of a wood biomass power plant to supply 10 megawatts to the national grid. Again, this activity will further expand economic base of the forest sector through the development of a wood pellet industry.

To address the issue of forest degradation, the reforestation of degraded forest supports plantation development for Fiji's future timber needs, restoration of degraded forests and moreover, the restoration of biodiversity. Under this activity, a total of 255 hectares have been reforested using native and exotic tree species with awareness programmes on the importance of forests to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Madam Speaker, in the past years, my Ministry has been promoting the planting of sandalwood through the Sandalwood Development Programme. A total area of 26 hectares was planted during the period, bringing the total area planted to 126 hectares since 2011. This high-value commodity will significantly contribute to the growth of the sector over the next decade.

The Ministry has significantly invested in the improvement of livelihoods, targeting rural communities, with a total investment of approximately FJ\$2 million in machines, infrastructure, training and implementation. Assistance was provided to 10 wood carvers from Kabara, Tailevu, Ogea and Namuka-i-Lau, towards achieving their dreams through the procurement of value-adding machines, worth around FJ\$100,000.

Madam Speaker, in response to the needs for timber from communities affected by *TC Winston*, the Ministry has been providing assistance through the provision of necessary equipment for processing of logs for housing. Eight Lucas portable sawmills were distributed to the following communities:

- Namoli;
- Dawasamu;
- Wainibuka;
- Lakeba;
- Narocake; and
- Koro.

In addition to the eight Lucas portable sawmills, assistance was also provided by Mission 21, a non-profit faith-based organisation, for a further six portable sawmills which are currently in the following sites:

- Dawasamu;
- Moturiki;
- Ovalau;
- Koro; and
- Vanua Balavu.

Madam Speaker, a new mobile timber treatment plant is due to arrive into the country next month. This will allow us to provide timber treatment services to our rural communities for the first time. This timber treatment plant is specifically designed to conform to our regulations and environmental protection standards.

To address the long standing issue of pine utilisation in the maritime areas, the successful launching of the operations of the Narocake Pine Processing Centre in Gau, showing our commitment towards empowering rural communities through the use of their natural resources. The Narocake Pine Processing Centre is now providing timber to the island of Gau and also nearby islands affected by *TC Winston*.

Madam Speaker, the above constitute our major areas of progress within the past two years and with the current resources allocated to my Ministry, we will ensure the sustainability of Fiji's forest resources,

In conclusion, the Ministry of Forests will continue to play a significant role in our national development strategies and the achievement of our obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Madam Speaker, I wish to extend my appreciation to the Government for the strong leadership during the past years and looking forward to a much more prosperous future for all Fijians.

May God bless us all and may God bless Fiji.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, our visitors in the gallery; *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, I would like to thank and congratulate His Excellency for demonstrating a consistent and unwavering faith in Fiji, and in our ability to offer our people the best we can, despite the recent challenges brought by the aftermath of *Cyclone Winston*. I also thought that he has chosen to use his position to advocate on an issue that affects far too many Fijians and that is, the prevalence of NCDs in the country.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's call to the Members of this House to support democracy, to think beyond our parochial interests, whatever they may be based on, to join hands together, to grow our economy and to think seriously about the society we build for our children and those to follow, was exactly what we needed to hear. This is the message that will shape the legacy we leave behind for the next generation and I think it is the message that will drive the reforms and the strategic thinking that I plan to bring to this Ministry.

Madam Speaker, may I also say how honoured I am to take on this new portfolio. My predecessor, the Honourable Jone Usamate, has set standards that I will try to meet every day, and I would also like to thank for the energy and dedication that he brought to his role. As the new Minister for Health and Medical Services, I say to this august House that I am committed to serve my fellow Fijians to the best of my ability.



Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will be embarking on a new plan of action that puts access to quality health care at the centre of every decision we make or we are going to make. The Fijian people need to know where they can go to receive treatment, when they can go and what services our doctors and nurses are capable of providing. People's lives are dependent on access to this information and by making this information readily available, we give our people the truth that they need to be proactive about their health and remain as productive members of our society.

Madam Speaker, currently, we have three major divisional hospitals operating with one in the Central Division, one in the Western Division and one in the Northern Division. We also have sub-divisional hospitals established throughout the country with five in the Central Division, five in the Eastern Division, six in the Western Division and three in the Northern Division. Currently, there are only two specialised hospitals in the country, both in the Central Division, and our divisional and sub-divisional hospitals currently offer 24 hours emergency care.

Madam Speaker, we do, however, have a high number of health centres and nursing stations spread throughout the country - 98 nursing stations and 34 health centres, so it is vital that we build the capacity of our nurses to provide specialised care so they can better serve their often isolated regions.

The Ministry embarked on a nursing specialisation programme over the past several years, that sent our nurses overseas for attachments in specialised areas, including emergency nursing, paediatric nursing, intensive care nursing, paramedic-care nursing, oncology nursing, psychiatric nursing, advanced midwifery and other related areas to population health.

Madam Speaker, these nurses have performed extremely well and have brought knowledge and expertise back to Fiji, that they can pass on to their counterparts. The challenge we now face is how to properly recognise and reward these nurses based on their qualification. We are currently working with the Ministry of Civil Service to develop the remuneration packages and structured that we need to recruit and retain top talent in the country.

Madam Speaker, we are also taking serious measures to ensure service offerings are expanded at these locations and that chronic issues affecting health service delivery are addressed. There is no accurate measurement of just how satisfying access to high quality health care can be for our ordinary people, so we must be unrelenting in our own efforts to give every Fijian the knowledge that they should ever need in terms of quality health care and ways to help them.

I am sure you will agree with me that we need to keep our hospitals clean, we need to cultivate friendly, professional attitudes among health care providers, and we need to instil a sense of compassion and empathy for those in our society who suffer from effects of ill-health.

We have begun working with the Fiji College of Medical Practitioners and the Fiji Medical Association to reduce the long patient-waiting queues in public hospitals. These lengthy queues, Madam Speaker, at most of the times can serve as a deterrent for people who may otherwise be proactive about their health issues, so we need to assure our people that their health concerns will be addressed in a timely manner.

We have confirmed that there will be a pooling of "locum doctors," these are doctors who can fill-in during busy periods to help remedy the doctor shortages we currently face. This means, shorter queues and more opportunities for our Fijians to seek treatment when they need it. A locum arrangement with Nadi Hospital is currently underway and others will start around the country on the basis of need.

Madam Speaker, this locum arrangement will bring in General Practitioners to support our health sector in critical areas. It is an immediate fix to the service delivery issues that we face until we are able to staff our own hospitals appropriately. We are allocating substantial resources and efforts towards recruiting doctors from overseas to fill in both, the clinical and public health areas gap.

We are also currently working with the Ministry of Civil Service to fill those gaps and so far, have approved 879 new positions for medical superintendents, consultants, Chief, Principal and senior medical officers and medical interns and assistants. So far, we have filled 553 of these positions, and we will continue to seek qualified professionals for the remaining 326 spots.

These new recruitment efforts, Madam Speaker, come on top of our recent pay rise, ranging from 56 to 81 per cent for our doctors, which has made major strides in increasing job security and satisfaction and has also given our doctors the professional recognition that they deserve.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency, in His Address also highlighted the need to engage with and care for our younger generation. To that aim, the review of the peer educator programme is in motion now so that Fiji can have in place a programme better designed to confront the social health issues affecting our young people. The Ministry will establish youth friendly health centres at the divisional and district levels, to give our young people greater access to the services and information that they need.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health & Medical Services, through its Public Health Division, recognises the importance of a holistic integrated approach to a child's learning, as well as to educate our children at an early age about the benefits of healthy living and the importance of caring for the environment is definitely a right step in the right direction.

Madam Speaker, equal access to health care is a fundamental human right as enshrined in our Constitution and also a key tool in building the resilience of our families and communities. This is the key undertaking of the Ministry and the founding principle behind the free-medicine initiative. Last year, the Government compiled a list of 142 medicines to make freely available to eligible members of the public by the end of September, a total of 16,992 registrations were made and a total of 23,925 free medicine cards were created and have been distributed to-date.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency discussed the upcoming review of health laws in the 2016 Parliament Session. We fully support this review and believe that it will make a huge difference in improving public health security. The Public Health Protection Bill and the Quarantine Bill will modernise Fiji's legislation and align them to international best practices and give us more resources to respond to the health challenges faced by our people.

Madam Speaker, the modernisation of our health legislation will also give my Ministry a vast array of new tools to respond to new health threats, and will boost public health protections in the immediate and long-term. These include protections from communicable and other diseases, environmental risks and injuries.

Madam Speaker, the growing epidemic of Non-communicable Diseases is undoubtedly one of the major challenges confronting our health system today.

We must acknowledge that each one of us plays a vital role in protecting and promoting our own health, and the health for our families and our loved ones. NCDs are a challenge that can be successfully mitigated if each one of us takes responsibility for eating well, exercising and avoiding smoking and alcohol. Data from the US-based Institute for Medical Health Metrics and Evaluation tells us that about 18 percent of the burden of diseases in Fiji is attributed to dietary factors with

around 7 percent being due to tobacco and 5 percent to low physical activity. Madam Speaker, to put it simply, these three causes taken together, account for almost a third of the ill health that affects our country. Each one of us, through our own actions, can help reduce the pressures on our country's Health Budget and at the same time enjoy better, healthier and longer lives.

Madam Speaker, 80 percent of the activities and choices that shape individual behaviour of our health occurs outside the doctor's office. So, we need to support healthy decision-making where our people can live, work, learn and play healthy. It is about promoting health attitudes, getting our people educated on the benefits of physical fitness and working alongside our other Ministries to encourage people to get moving.

Madam Speaker, I am extremely proud to have been given the opportunity to read the work of the Ministry that does so much to improve the lives of our fellow Fijians. I intend to play my own part in honouring the Honourable Prime Minister's pledge, that we will leave no one behind, even in Fiji. I look forward to working alongside with all the Honourable Members in the House, the public and all our stakeholders in advancing our health sector and ensuring that all of our people can make fulfilling lives and have access to medical services and information, that they need to keep themselves healthy and happy.

Madam Speaker, with those words, I commend His Excellency's Address to this august House.

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

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Members of the House, our respected guests in the public gallery and the viewers watching the proceedings on television; *ni sa bula, namaste, asalam-walekum* and a very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, I rise to thank His Excellency the President for his inaugural Address that sets alight how Fiji has turned the tide in Rio and the rise from the destructions caused by *Tropical Cyclone Winston* with no one left behind. It is the winning platform that stirs fellow Fijians to believe in themselves that we can do anything if we put our minds on to it and do it with hard work and with unity for the cause. Our noble banner blue has flown to the far corners of the earth and certainly will fly to higher altitudes with the smart navigation of the Fijian Government.

Madam Speaker, it is my honour to address this august House. As the new Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, I pledge to serve with loyalty and to the very best of my ability under the leadership of my Honourable Minister. It is my gratitude and my aim that I will be focussing on people living with disabilities in a holistic sense. I am thankful that the experience I had with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has equipped me well to serve my fellow Fijians in this new Ministry.

Madam Speaker, we created a new page in our history books when our Constitution articulated the Rights of People with Disabilities. A new beacon has taken shape with the Disability Bill and the processes of ratifying the Convention of the Rights of People Living with Disabilities. The landscape of change for people living with disabilities has started and it is the result of the Fijian Government having the commitment to make it happen for them. This commitment is not a promise on paper but one that is progressively unveiled for all to see. It is one where people living with disabilities are rising up with happiness and delight.

Madam Speaker, my eyes lit up with joy on the 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 when Naomi Lewakita stood in Parliament to be acknowledged in this august House. Naomi read the braille version of the

Constitution on the Rights of Disabled Persons. History was also made when the Budget Address by the Honourable Minister for Economy for the new fiscal year was televised live with interpretation in sign language. The seasons of happiness for the disabled has gone to newer heights.

Madam Speaker, before this House is the new Disability Bill, a Bill which has brought happy hearts to people with disabilities in Fiji. We needed to uphold individual or collective rights of the disabled population and formulate a legislation that will appropriately address the needs and aspirations of person with disabilities living in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, such legislation will uphold the rights of person with disabilities. Disability is a cross cutting issue, like gender, poverty, violence against women and children and NCDs. The move from hand out to 'rights-based approach' has given the ultimate provisions for a new legislation like the Disability Bill 2014 to override all existing legislation pertaining to disability.

Madam Speaker, addressing the rights of people living with disabilities has been given a lift with a number of measures in place to support it. The public buses will have priority seating in the first five rows for expectant mothers, people with disabilities and senior citizens. More to that, people living with disabilities are given special consideration under the Poverty Benefit Scheme. They are also exempted from bus fares in public buses. Their community base rehabilitation and the integration of persons with disabilities into the community will be an ongoing matter that will require the support of all.

Madam Speaker, the National Baseline Survey on Disability 2008-2009 saw an estimate of 11,402 with 6,180 men and 5,222 women with disabilities in Fiji. The rise in NCDs can be viewed as a leading contribution to the increasing disabilities for each of the development cohorts of life. To have a nation where there is a limb amputation in every eight hours is a huge threat to the expectation that people age with a good quality of life.

Madam Speaker, the right of every disabled person to access justice, education, life, participation in cultural life and recreation, to employment without discrimination and participation in public and political life will be a reality check on us. Other important provisions in the UN Convention include the recognition that women with disabilities suffer multiple forms of discrimination and the recognition of the special needs of children with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, there is a good move in addressing disability in Fiji, so as to develop a more inclusive society, create greater awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and identify priority areas for action to dismantle barriers hindering the full participation of people with disabilities in the social and economic life in the Fiji Islands.

Madam Speaker, people with disabilities are among the most marginalised groups in the world. People with disabilities have poorer health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities.

Madam Speaker, disability is now understood to be a human rights issue. People are disabled by society, not just by their bodies. These barriers can be overcome if Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations, professionals and people with disabilities and their families work together. The Fijian Government has paid attention to remove these injustices and miseries.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency made a strong mention on the range of specific programmes to assist the most vulnerable members of our society. This does not leave our people living with disabilities and we are grateful for the well thought-out measure that matters to people living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, in taking action to bridge the human divide and be an inclusive society, the Fijian Government is changing the playfield for the people living with disabilities. The significant investment in infrastructure by our Government, new opportunities for better livelihoods of disabled persons will be increased.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency made reference to the disproportionate lead we are taking to draw global attention to the urgent need to confront the challenges of climate change. Our recent experience is an opportunity to build back resilient communities which will include a safe haven for people living with disabilities. The moment in our land where we tap the wonderful sense of unity that has come our way can trickle to the lives of fellow Fijians living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry is the lead agency for the people living with disabilities and will stand ready to work with all stakeholders to see mainstreaming of children with special needs into the education system, the mainstreaming into the workforce and the actions that will come alive with the Disability Bill. We now enjoy strong friendships with the superpowers of this planet and through that, we can look comprehensively at the unmet areas for disabled persons.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will work with the Ministry of Economy for the full and smart utilisation of the budget allocation of \$1.6 million for the people living with disabilities in the West and the disability NGOs in Fiji. The gender and social focus on our communities will bring about good returns.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to remind Parliament that the 2016-2017 Budget gives a 300 percent tax rebate to those who employ persons with disabilities. This is a wonderful opportunity, it gives more economic opportunity to our disabled citizens. It gives them dignity, it gives us access to talent that we have not accessed ever before.

Madam Speaker, the issues for people living with disabilities will be structurally actioned with the change in the existing governance structure. It can only get better and brighter from now. The energy that made a landfall in Fiji after Rio, has also touched our fellow Fijians with disabilities. We are now on a journey where all are included and this is the very best of times to live in our country.

Madam Speaker, I close with a request to this august House that whatever we can do to alleviate the misery and empower fellow Fijians living with disabilities will go a long way to bring them joy, peace and comfort.

I thank you Madam Speaker, *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Just before I call on the next speaker, we have another group of students from the University of Fiji, Saweni Campus, who in the gallery with us. I would like to welcome you and thank you for your interest in your Parliament.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Mosese Bilitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion which is before the House, moved in the name of the Honourable Prime Minister "that this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech."

Madam Speaker, firstly I thank His Excellency for his most gracious speech and his call for this august House to work together as elected representatives of the people. His Excellency opened the 2016 Parliament Session on 12th September with a simple message, and I quote:

“The nation calls on you to do all you can to harness the spirit of our Olympic win. To tap the wonderful sense of unity that has descended on our beloved Fiji. ...To use this Parliament as a force to propel us forward to the greatness we glimpsed in Rio.”

Madam Speaker, the greatness we glimpsed in Rio was achieved by the spirit of every Fijian, local and abroad, shouldering the team. Our prayers, blessings and good wishes was what that released the unbelievable, magical and spectacular at the world stage. The world saw the real Fiji and God showed the world who Fiji was. Listening to Captain Osea Kolinisau and all the players' interview after the final, they all acknowledged that God gave them the strength to win. They sang, 'We have overcome by the blood of the lamb and the power of this word, we have overcome.' They were pointing to Heaven and praising God in tears for giving them victory.

Madam Speaker, the greatness we glimpsed in Rio was a spiritual revival where God used a small nation with limited resources to spread to the four corners of the world - Philippians 4: 13:

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

That revival has manifested and even in areas that were struck by *Tropical Cyclone Winston* where we have seen new vegetation, new fruits have grown faster not waiting for the plants to mature like what we have seen in Naqaidamu, Koro. Even vegetables and fruits that never grew there before have sprang out of the soil.

The healing water of Natadradave in Dawasamu and the testimonies we have heard and seen is evidence of a spiritual revival which has transformed into the physical. Fiji is now a place of healing place.

Madam Speaker, how can we use this Parliament to lift us to greatness and healing? The short history of our Parliament records, we had four resignations from the other side of the House and two suspensions from this side of the House, plus the death of a late Honourable Member of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, those who have resigned have cited reasons to concentrate on their businesses, farming, family and health but this indicates that they did not value the votes of ordinary men and women who had put them here. They have betrayed the trust of their voters and they have allowed their personal interest to override the oath they took in this House. What image are we projecting as a Parliament? I call on Honourable Members from the Government side to prevent future resignations because it undermines the rights of voters who participated in the 2014 General Elections.

Madam Speaker, to Government's Legislative Programme for the 2016 session, I again ask the Government to minimise the use of Standing Order 51, like the New Zealand Parliament, where the expedited procedure is only used if there is an error in the law or in practice and the error has made it difficult for proper interpretation. In those circumstances, it will be logical to use Standing Order 51.

When members of the Opposition question the Government on the 'Help for Home' initiative on why hardware materials have not reached the recipients? Why students are still learning in tents? Why villagers after six months post-*Winston* are still living in tents? It is not grandstanding for

personal or political gain, it is not trying to promote division, it is not peddling false information to create no confidence against the Government, but it is reminding the Government that they are His Excellency's Government and they are elected by the people to serve everyone equally and not to delay their services in areas where FijiFirst received less votes. If pigs could vote, they would always vote for the guy who brings the food, even though he is the same guy who is going to slaughter and eat them later.

People have simply found out the disjointed policies of the Fiji First Government where everything looks nice in a budget estimate but no real implementation, coupled with false starts. People at grassroots level do not know the direction to follow if they want to apply for Government programmes and even at divisional level, officers when enquired about any recent Government announcement, do not have the details and answers. They refer people to table after table until there is no other table to blame or refer the matter to.

Madam Speaker, I would like to put it back to the Honourable Prime Minister, we have good players in this Parliament but some are not team players. They are concerned with individual performance. Grabbing the ball themselves and not passing it to others so that we can put points together as a team and storm to victory together as a nation. Time and again, Honourable Members of this side of the House have called for a bipartisan approach, joint committees for *Tropical Cyclone Winston* recovery, called for a special sitting of Parliament to review the 2016 Budget but Government does not want to pass the ball and as a result, it is dropping the ball by not delivering its promises to the people.

Madam Speaker, we are hearing from the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) that we are expecting a 2.5 percent growth and the revenue has generated but when we look into the rural areas, there is no sign of growth and wealth. I call on the Government to put proper delivery measures so that materials arrive quickly and in the right order, so that the construction is not affected. In some villages only nails have arrived, in other areas only roofing irons have arrived and not the full set of materials ordered. For some, nothing has come.

Madam Speaker, during the committee sessions with the IPU Team from Geneva who visited Parliament in July, they were surprised when they heard that all petitions brought in the House are subject to a vote before it can reach any Standing Committee.

Madam Speaker, the call by His Excellency the President for this House to promote unity is sometimes questionable, given the events that unfolded at the weekend of the Constitution celebration. Leaders of the Opposition political parties, a trade unionist and an NGO coordinator were arrested for a meeting to discuss the Constitution. This is another indication of whether we really have democracy in Fiji or not.

Madam Speaker, I ask the Honourable Prime Minister today to place his cards on the table face upwards. Let there be no secret agendas. This side of the House is always prepared to work with him in spite of all his mistakes.

Madam Speaker, my personal observation for the last two years, hearing various arguments put forward from both sides of the House during the debates, I have concluded and so as many people who have watched the proceedings live, "that this House is a House of vote, only the majority wins." Whatever motion comes up, it will end up in a vote on party line, consequently Members betray their conscience.

Madam Speaker, let me compare His Excellency the President's appeal of the unity with the South African political transition to democracy. After the late Nelson Mandela was President for the Republic of South Africa, he used the 1995 Rugby World Cup that was held in South Africa as a tool

to unite the nation. Their Springboks were given the task and the nation called them through the Head of State to win so that the nation will be liberated and using the World Cup win to lift the nation to greatness.

Madam Speaker, but before the Springboks lifted the Webb Ellis trophy in 1995, the foundation for that greatness was built from 1990 to 1994. First, was Nelson Mandela, released as a political prisoner, then on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1991 a negotiation forum was set up, called the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) where government and all political parties negotiated a way forward for an elected assembly to write a written constitution. In the process, an interim government of national unity was ushered in to supervise such election, control the state media, military and generally oversee the transition to a new democratic South Africa.

Madam Speaker, through negotiations a CODESA 2 was set up for the next phase of transition and the government at that time under President de Klerk also put on the negotiation table the immunity of the security forces, safeguard the jobs of those in the civil service, a senate to act as a bilateral parliamentary system and a power-sharing arrangement with the ANC for a fixed term. These were all parts of the interim constitution to enable the elections to be held.

Madam Speaker, in February 1992, the government and the ANC announced an agreement in principle on a five-year government of national unity, a multi-party cabinet, a creation of a transitional executive council and elections to be held as early as the end of 1993.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1993 the CODESA multi-party forum announced that 27 April, 1994 will be the date of the election for the people to vote for the representative of the constituent assembly.

Madam Speaker, the constituent assembly served as the Parliament and was mandated to review the interim constitution which facilitated the elections.

Madam Speaker, after the elections, Nelson Mandela's ANC Party won two-thirds majority of the vote and a multi-party cabinet was set up where Mandela was President, de Klerk was sworn in as second Deputy President and Thabo Mbeki was sworn in as the first Deputy President.

Madam Speaker, a permanent constitution was then written by the multi-party cabinet, approved by the constituent assembly. South Africa adopted a constitution that was negotiated and all parties saw the value of transforming a country into a nation.

Madam Speaker, when His Excellency the President said "tap the wonderful sense of hearing that has descended on our beloved Fiji from the Rio win." In order to achieve that I believe we need to revisit the foundation of our Parliament which is the 2013 Constitution and appoint a joint Parliamentary Committee to appoint a Constitutional Review Commission.

Madam Speaker, any transition to democracy always involves an interim constitution and I view the 2013 Constitution as an enabling constitution to allow the 2014 general elections. Despite, the Honourable Prime Minister winning a record votes in 2014, we still need to give power back to the people through a Constitution that will be approved by the elected Members of this Parliament.

The 2013 Constitution does not have that mandate and does not enjoy that stamp yet. That is our duty as legislature to pass Constitution for the people through an introduced Bill after the people are consulted.

Madam Speaker, even the 1990 Constitution was reviewed by Parliament, where Major General Sitiveni Rabuka took power from the British Crown in 1987, declared Fiji a Republic and gave back to the people power through the 1997 Constitution which was passed by Parliament.



Madam Speaker, our liberation struggle in 1987 was not about racism but it was about a fight against a system that held power that belongs to the Republic of Fiji. Major General Sitiveni Rabuka while Prime Minister in 1997 gave the people a sovereign democratic state.

Madam Speaker, the 2006 *coup* was useless because Fiji was already a sovereign democratic state. However, what is done cannot be undone, but we need to remove some of these tentacles of a dictatorial system at work today and the spirit of intimidation, suspicion and fear cannot be part of a nation that wants to achieve greatness.

Madam Speaker, the effects of the 2000 and the 2006 *coups* have caused many deep political wounds that have been untreated; wounds which the pain people still feel today on both sides of the political divide. We need to restore the honour of our Republic and the victims, the oppressed and the oppressor needs to be liberated. Hatred, bitterness and fear cannot be part of a sovereign democratic state.

Madam Speaker, this is a time to heal those deep wounds which have created divisions in the nation and to build a new Fiji, where the honour of our republic will be a national interest to defend.

Madam Speaker, at the moment we all advance our own political agendas. Only when we have reconciliation and healing, then the greatness His Excellency had alluded to will be achieved.

Madam Speaker, we need to take a bipartisan approach and appoint a joint Parliamentary Committee and in doing so as elected members of the people, we need to work together in a constructive manner and dispel the tensions in the negotiations.

Madam Speaker, the Government of the day should have the foresight to understand and accept that all people of Fiji must, through negotiations and equal participants in the process, together determine what they want to make of their future.

Madam Speaker, I see that the Honourable Prime Minister has taken the first step towards the right direction by not changing the flag.

Madam Speaker, on the other note, I think the Honourable Prime Minister must give the Foreign Affairs portfolio to someone else in Cabinet because his supposed to be the last line of defence. Now he has placed himself in the first line of attack. This will also increase his travelling.

Madam Speaker, people are not freely coming to present their views to Standing Committees for public consultation. Around the country, luckily if you get one or two persons coming in to present their views to the Committee.

What can be done so that people find this August House more interesting? We need to find a solution so that the democratic views of the people are heard and consulted in matters of national importance that are before the Standing Committees.

Madam Speaker, we need to reflect on ways in which we can improve our quality of services to the Fijian people because it is to them that we owe our allegiance as Members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, having said that –

- (a) no matter how we may have marketed our Fijian made brand; promoted our national airline; participated in peacekeeping; and championed climate change;

- (b) no matter whether a Fijian representative is the President of the UN General Assembly, our Permanent Mission in Geneva has promoted the 2013 Constitution and provided justifications that Fiji is complying with human rights, workers' rights, indigenous rights and the Sustainable Development Goals; and
- (c) the Honourable Prime Minister has been invited to speak in many international gathering of world leaders, our development partners are willing to assist Fiji; or whether Fiji has increased its presence in the world or strengthened its voice in the region.

I say it again if the Honourable Prime Minister does not allow Parliament to review the 2013 Constitution and pass a new Constitution that must passage through this House then Fiji will remain a half democracy. Unless that is done then Fiji will become a full democracy.

Madam Speaker, once again, I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for the motion that is before this August House that this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech. I say it is a gracious speech but I hope Government will consider constructive negotiations in hope of a new born liberty. Out of the experiences of our political history, must be born a society of which humanity will be proud. We should be at the end to achieve our political emancipation and pledge ourselves in transforming people into leaders and leaders to be agents of change.

With those words Madam Speaker, thank you for your indulgence.

Let freedom reign and may democracy win. God Bless Fiji.

*Vinaka.*

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. Before I call on the next speaker, I would like to seek leave of Parliament to extend a sitting so that we can complete the remaining four speakers before we break for lunch and break for the day?

Honourable Members, we have a Bill to discuss in the afternoon, we will just extend it until the next speaker finishes his speech because he has 20 minutes and that may take us longer than 12.30 p.m. which is the lunch hour.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Joeli Cawaki.

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of Cabinet and my fellow Members of Parliament; *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to comment in response to His Excellency the President's Address at the opening of this 2016-2017 session of Parliament, delivered on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.

Madam Speaker, I begin by acknowledging the opening Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konousi Konrote, and I respectfully thank and congratulate His Excellency for setting the new course for this new parliamentary session.

Madam Speaker, I wish to restate some of the words by His Excellency the President of Fiji, which I believe every Member of this august House can take note as we begin this parliamentary session and for which I quote from Page 6 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2016:

“Let us all be worthy in public life of the ordinary men and women who have put us here, have given us their trust and to whom we owe our ultimate duty, our ultimate loyalty...

Let us rededicate ourselves today to the task of continuing to rejuvenate our nation and giving it the sense of direction and purpose it deserves. Let us set an example in this Parliament for young Fijians, who look to us to build a future worthy of their dreams and aspirations because it is by setting a standard of excellence here that we can inspire them to excellence themselves, and be powerful role models in the quest to make Fiji great.”

Madam Speaker, these are great words of wisdom and must be embraced. We, as lawmakers, must give these words true meaning in our roles of reviewing existing and debating new ones.

Madam Speaker, we have reached the halfway mark of Fiji's first truly democratic governance. Our performances and achievements thus far can be tangibly seen through the Fiji Government's large scale investments in roading, water and electricity infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, large vast populated and isolated remote areas which were previously inaccessible are now accessible by both roads and shipping services. Food crops and other commodities from these isolated and remote areas are now reaching both local and overseas markets. The nation is now receiving improved clean water supplies. Electricity is being made available to every ordinary Fijian.

Madam Speaker, there has been a marked increase in direct foreign investments. Fiji's tourism sector is blooming with recent increase in Asian arrivals. These are only just some of the many accomplishments that the FijiFirst Government have contributed and helped achieve during the last two sessions, and we will continue to 2018 and beyond. I wish to applaud and congratulate the FijiFirst Government for making this a reality.

Madam Speaker, we as a nation are now stronger and united than we have ever been in our entire history. This has been attributed to both fate and sheer inclination and utter determination, demonstrating our sheer will to succeed.

Madam Speaker, *Tropical Cyclone Winston* placed a 'dagger-like' stab into the hearts of our brothers and sisters in the devastated areas, stretching from Vanua Balavu, Taveuni, Southern Vanua Levu, Lomaiviti, Tailevu North, Nakorotubu, Wainibuka to Lautoka, the Mamanuca Groups and to the Yasawa Group of Islands in the West, crippling our nation's infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, what was deemed to be the worst natural disaster ever recorded in history, resulted in bringing a nation together at all levels unimaginable. Supposed differences in race, religion and culture stood for nothing as the true Fijian traits of togetherness and helping each other outshone Mother Nature's disastrous whip. The post-*TC Winston* scenario clearly shows our resilience as a nation.

Madam Speaker, whilst we are recovering from *TC Winston*, our Rio 7s heroes put smiles on every Fijian's face when they showed the world that out of adversity and tribulation can come success. Such is the sheer heart of the Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, in this House, we may have different political ideologies and aspirations but we have together witnessed the achievement during our past two parliamentary sessions together that illustrates that Fiji as a nation is on the verge of greatness. I challenge every Member of this august House to cast aside our political squabbles and work together to making Fiji great tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, may I now move on to rural and maritime development. Developing the infrastructure and living standard of our people in the remote and isolated rural and maritime areas must be a priority and I am pleased that the FijiFirst Government has provided the appropriate allocation for its development.

Madam Speaker, you may have heard our Honourable Prime Minister say on many occasions how important it is to the FijiFirst Government that every Fijian has the same opportunity to experience the benefits of the new Fiji. This is a vision that we fully embrace and work daily to achieve.

Madam Speaker, improving the lives of Fijians in rural and maritime areas is only possible if our national integrity is preserved and we can ensure economic and social stabilities. It is only possible when we respect the will of the Fijian people, who freely express their choice of government in the last General Elections.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has placed special and distinct emphasis on the following infrastructure projects to support the rural and maritime areas:

1. Upgrading of the old and current water supply systems and the building of new ones, the demand for access to clean and safe drinking water is increasing. With increasing development in rural and maritime areas, together with the immediate threats of climatic variations and the competing interests for the limited land available, it is therefore critical to identify new water sources and devise new water delivery systems for our increasing population.
2. Provision of upgraded roads, bridges, jetties and ports to ensure accessibility. The FijiFirst Government will continue with its road upgrading programme in the upgrading of old and current roads with the extension of new access roads to villages and communities in the isolated and remote rural and maritime areas. Also in the Programme, the upgrading of old and current bridges, jetties and ports, and the building of new ones to support the increasing influx of traffic into our roading systems, and new maritime shipping destinations.
3. Extending the national FEA power grid and the establishment of rural power supply through generators, mini-hydro systems, solar system and the new hybrid power system. The increasing population, together with the increasing cost of operations for generator power systems places pressure on the old and current system and increases the demand for the extension of the national grid in Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Levuka. In other areas, the demand for other power sources, like solar power systems, the mini-hydro systems and the new hybrid power system - a system where solar is the primary supplier, supported by generator power in times of prolonged adverse weather conditions.
4. Madam Speaker, investment into our communication infrastructure to bring all Fijians into our national conversation: the installation of new communication towers to ensure full coverage of the three telecommunication network providers in the country to ensure wider connectivity and access, especially to our people in the remote and isolated rural and maritime areas.

5. Madam Speaker, investment in free and quality education at all levels for the education of our younger generations, with support to school building improvements, including those in remote isolated areas. The support to free tuition fees programme, free text books programme and the free bus fare scheme have shown impacts in the increase in school enrolments and improved daily attendance of students. The support to school infrastructure upgrading programme enhances the teaching and learning environment, especially schools in the rural and maritime areas after years of neglect due to funding constraints. The revolutionary investment towards building a smarter and more skilled Fiji has been one of the greatest achievements of the FijiFirst Government and we will continue to build on this achievement in the new Parliamentary session.
6. Madam Speaker, modernising our hospitals and other health facilities to ensure quality health care service delivery, especially to health facilities in the remote and isolated rural and maritime areas. The building and relocation of new nursing station with provisions of new and modern health equipment to ensure total service delivery and treatment on site rather than referrals which is time-consuming and expensive for patients.
7. Acquisition of new vessels to the Government Shipping Services to enhance accessibility to all our maritime ports and destinations: Also, to increase the list of approved maritime destination for the Fiji Shipping Franchise Programme to include destination not serviced by private shipping operators. This will ensure exclusive shipping coverage and facilitate trading, people movement and market accessibility to these destinations. The arrival of another Government Shipping vessel in this new Parliamentary session will facilitate an increased maritime accessibility to all our maritime destinations.
8. Madam Speaker, lastly, investment to our rural and maritime Small and Micro-Enterprise (SMEs) and our rural entrepreneurs to facilitate production and market access: the support to ensure increase in supply of production to meeting market demands with the right quality, quantity and the consistency of supply to meet the demand timelines. This facilitates the rural economic spin where rural employment will increase and lower rural unemployment thus raising the living standards of our people in the rural and maritime areas. This ultimately will be the catalyst to reversing the rural to urban drift.

Madam Speaker, these are all parts of the FijiFirst Government's larger strategy to put Fijians in our rural and maritime areas on equal footing, so that we may step into Fiji's future together.

Madam Speaker, we are making unprecedented progress in our quest to positioning ourselves right and getting back on the right track. Our people are progressing forward and are already benefitting from that. As the result of our progress in the last two Parliamentary sessions, we are gaining international, regional and national respect and recognition, and that will continue in this new Parliamentary session and beyond.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to the challenges ahead in this new Parliamentary session, and know that the contributions that we will make in this august House will put Fiji in great stead tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, we sit here today as proud Fijians knowing that the weight of our beloved nation rests on all our shoulders. The Fijian people have placed their faith and trust in

us and I further challenge you all to repay such faith and trust through meaningful and meritorious debates in this new 2016-2017 Parliamentary sessions.

Madam Speaker, I genuinely thank you for your indulgence. *Vinaka vakalevu sara.*

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members; with that presentation, we will now adjourn Parliament as we break for lunch and we will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.35 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.29 p.m.

### **CUSTOMS TARIFF (AMENDMENT NO. 2) BILL 2016**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at this point we will interrupt the debate to deal with the Customs and Tariff (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2016.

We will continue with the three final speakers in today's Batting Order at the conclusion of the debate on the Bill.

Pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament this morning, Parliament will now debate and vote on the Customs Tariff Amendment No. 2 Bill 2016. This debate will be limited to 15 minutes and I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Bill now be debated upon and be passed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do we have a seconder?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Customs Tariff (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2016 seeks to amend the Customs Tariff Act 1986 which is the principal Act, to give effect to the changes to the Customs Tariff Schedule as reflected in the latest amendments to the Harmonised System (HS) or Non-Clemature drawn by the World Customs Organisation, Fiji of course is a member of WCO. Necessary consultation were held with Fiji Revenue Customs Authority and Solicitor-General's Office.

Madam Speaker, by way of background Fiji is a member of WCO and as a member, Fiji is under an obligation to update its Customs Tariff Schedule when amendments to the HS are recommended by the WCO. The HS is a universal economic language and code for goods and indispensable tool for International Trade. It is updated periodically by the WCO to ensure that it is consistent with changing trade patterns and development in technology.

Madam Speaker, it is announced that the 2016 to 2017 Annual Budget, WCO has recommended changes in the HS after its most recent periodic review. For that reason, the Bill seeks to amend the principal Act by replacing the whole of Schedule 2 which is in this to ensure that the recommended changes in the HS are appropriately reflected in the principal Act. While the whole of Schedule 2 will be replaced, there will be no change in the applicable rates of duty and no material change to the law. Only the classification of items and the corresponding code numbers will be amended to comply with the internationally recommended changes to the clarification codes as set out in the HS which therefore help Fiji to be unison with the rest of the world.

It is also prudent to note, Madam Speaker, that the change to the HS are to be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2017. It is only for that reason, Madam Speaker, that the Bill is being tabled from this sitting of Parliament to effect the required changes in the principal Act. Just by way of introduction of the clauses, Madam Speaker, Clause 1 of the Bill provide for the short title and commencement provisions, the Bill is pass by Parliament then the new Act will be decided as a Custom Tariff (Amendment No.2) Act 2016 and will come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2017.

Clause 2 of the Bill amends the Customs Tariff Budget (Amendment) Act 2016 by deleting Section 6 of that Act. Section 6 of the Customs Tariff Budget (Amendment) Act 2016 will then become redundant given that all the necessary changes have been incorporated into the Bill.

Clause 3 of the Bill amends the principal Act by repealing Schedule 2, which is what we have here and substituting a new updated Schedule 2 which has been revised in accordance with the WCO Harmonised System or Non-Clemature standards. Thus, with those introduction remarks, Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill now be debated upon.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is now open for debate. There being no input, Parliament will vote. The question is pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament this morning that the Customs Tariff Amendment No. 2 Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed. Does any Honourable Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of noes)

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

The Bill for an Act to Amend the Customs Tariff Act 1989 Bill No. 52 of 2016, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY'S ADDRESS**

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now resume debate on the Honourable Prime Minister's motion to thank His Excellency the President with his most gracious speech. I now call upon the Honourable Mohammed Dean to have the floor.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Members of Parliament and people of Fiji: a very good afternoon to you all.

Madam Speaker, allow me to contribute a short speech from one of the many inspirational messages that were delivered by His Excellency, the President of Fiji. In His Address, His Excellency asked us to promote unity rather than division. To think beyond parochial interests of ethnicity, religion, socio- economic status or where we come from.

Madam Speaker, I was very surprised, appalled and shocked by the fact that from the other side of the House, messages are coming whereby there are trying to glorify the events of 1987, specifically this side (*pointed to by the Honourable Member*) excluding this one. In other words, it is very sad that such messages are coming.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency drove strongly on the values of love and unity and let me give them a very simple message of what love and unity is all about.

Madam Speaker, love is known to be the most important of human values, everyone wants to love and be loved. Gradually everyone is capable of this wonderful feeling and love is of multifaceted nature. Sometimes because of it, we may think that our beloved people have qualities that they really do not have. At the same time, this feeling helps us to reveal all the positive features of the person we love. Only true love is able to change people for the better and likewise the nation as well. It makes us forgive and find happiness in the happiness of a beloved man or a woman or for our people.



Therefore, even though love can be considered a most complex concept of the deep human feeling, sometimes love also makes people do heroic things as well, which our noble Prime Minister has been doing so far because he has the love of all the people in his heart and accordingly he is trying to run the country with his feeling that he has.

Love can make life full of joy, fun and laughter. This feeling is able to give us a brand new life, help us gain new strengths and creative forces. At the same time, Madam Speaker, like I said, love can be a very complex feeling since it is not only associated with tenderness and joy, but also with pain and tears. Everything is not simple as it may seem, that is why many writers compare love will fall into the abyss.

We are all different, I understand that and we all express our love in different ways but the very notion of love has a complete different meaning to different people but we all love and we want to be loved. We need a leader who loves his people, who sees everyone with the same point of view that he sees everyone and we are all united by this desire – his desire of love for the people. Love makes us to take bold steps against all odds, take risks for what you believe in, what is right and only right for everyone and any step taken out of love will always have a very positive outcome.

Madam Speaker, it is the love for all our people of our nation that our Honourable Prime Minister has that drives him to steer our nation accordingly. I remembered once I was told before the 2014 General Elections that if our Honourable Prime Minister wanted, he could have made false promises and got all the votes but he is a man of principles, he believe in the concept of equality and likewise he became victorious. He won the hearts of so many people and we are proud to work for him and under him.

Madam Speaker, with unity, it is also a concept that comes from loving. Madam Speaker, unity and love for all races have always been the driving notion of our FijiFirst Party, led proudly by our great Honourable Prime Minister. The Honourable Prime Minister has always emphasises that unless we forego the politics of hatred and division amongst the different races in Fiji, we will never be able to move forward it as simple as that. He drove strongly on the notion of unity as well as which is needed for Fiji for a prosperous future for all.

Madam Speaker, man is free but still he has to depend on others. One man cannot produce everything. He produces one thing and thousands of people produce other things for him.

A teacher does teaching work, but who produces food and cloth and other things for him? In an age of unity and co-operation, one cannot live without the help of others. Therefore, we all must work together and if we do not, every member of our society will become weak and poor. So, Madam Speaker, unity gives strength to every member of the society.

Madam Speaker, let us speak about us as individuals. No home can be strong, no home can be happy and peaceful without unity and that is what our Honourable Prime Minister has been driving ever since. What will happen if everyone goes his own way? The family will break into pieces and likewise the nation will. One will not care for each other. They will not help each other in need. A divided house cannot face an enemy.

Madam Speaker, likewise, a society and a nation too cannot do without unity. Man is a social being. He helps others and others help him in turn. He has to depend upon his friends and neighbours and likewise, a leader depends on his people for unity and love amongst each other. If they are united, society will be strong as well as the country will be strong. Even birds and animals Madam Speaker, show a wonderful sense of unity. Ants are very are very small. But when they unite, they form a strong army. You cannot break a bundle of sticks, but how easily you can break them one by one!

Today, Madam Speaker, because of our Honourable Prime Minister, we are firmly united as one. We differ from one another in many ways I can understand, but still we are all Fijians.

Our national gold medal win in the recent Olympics united us all. We felt proud as a nation as a whole. We all stood together and celebrated this historical win. It is a great thing, indeed. but this unity is not enough. We have to work hard together in peace time as well. And Madam Speaker, whenever we felt that this peace and unity is threatened, our Government will always stand up to ensure it is maintained.

Madam Speaker, in my capacity as being a person with an educationist background, I also have a small message for all those students and children on the importance of unity in diversity and love:

- Unity in diversity boosts morale of people at workplace, schools, organisations and in community.
- It helps in enhancing relationships, teamwork among people, thus improve performance, quality of work, productivity and lifestyle.
- It makes communication effective even in bad situations.
- It keeps people always from social problems and help to manage conflicts easily.
- Improve healthy human relations and protects equal human rights for all.
- Unity in the diversity in Fiji Madam Speaker, provides a very important source for one of our most important industry and that is tourism. People of diverse cultures, traditions, cuisines, religions and clothing attract more visitors and tourists in Fiji from all across the world.
- It also gives rise to the habitat of national integration among people of the country even after being diverse in various ways.
- It gives value to the rich heritages of our country as well as strengthens and enriches our cultural heritage.
- Source of skilled and advance professionals in various areas to our country, it is all because if we drive towards unity, love and embrace diversity.

Madam Speaker, national unity is a necessity of peaceful and prosperous country and that is what our Honourable Prime Minister has been driving all this while. No one can deny the fact that unity is safety. Disunity results in fall of the countries.

There are many examples of the history of the world when due to lack of national unity there has been internal as well as external dangers to the security and survival of the countries. Even Fiji has gone through the same phase whenever our unity and peace were threatened by division of race and hatred. But under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, the future of the country looks bright, there is a strong sense of unity and oneness amongst the people of our nation.

Finally, I acknowledge all the word of wisdom delivered by His Excellency the President of Fiji to our nation and to the people of Fiji. I wish to highlight again, he said it is very important in thinking beyond parochial interests of ethnicity, religion, socio economic status and where we come from in Fiji. In other words Madam Speaker, Fiji is now driving strongly on the values of love and unity. Thank you.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Iliesa Delana to have the floor.

HON. I. DELANA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; and respected Members of Parliament. :Let me begin by thanking His Excellency the President for His Address at the opening of this session.

I share his commitment and vision for our young people, in particular. And will do my part to help realise the lofty goals that he set out. I also would to applaud His Excellency on his personal commitment to combatting the spread of NCDs in Fiji, as this is a goal that I personally hold dear to my heart and that is deeply engrained in the work of my Ministry.

The past two years had been active on both - the youth and sports front. The Honourable Minister will outline many of our achievements and plans for the next two years when he addresses the House later this week. I am honoured to serve this country in this portfolio, to travel around supporting our youth as they overcome challenges to achieve great things and contribute to moving Fiji forward.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Government and every Fijian, especially the sporting community, for their immense contributions towards sporting development in Fiji. This year has been a successful sporting year for Fiji, with many Fijian sportsmen and sportswomen and women participating, not only in international events abroad, but also in numerous events hosted right here at home.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Fiji National Sports Commission and Fiji Sports Council for their support and outstanding organisational assistance that has boosted Fiji's ability to host internationally recognised and sanctioned tournaments, supported by my Ministry. Through Government support and prudent management, Fiji has indeed established itself as the sporting hub of the Pacific.

Madam Speaker, this year alone, we have hosted the Oceania Volleyball Championships and Oceania Weightlifting Championships in May; the Oceania Swimming Championships held in June and the *Super Rugby* match between the Chiefs and the Crusaders in July.

Next month, Fiji will again host the Fiji International Golf Tournament in Natadola, the third year of our five year agreement.

Later this year, we will again host the Under 18 Oceania Basketball Championship, a world sanctioned and qualifying tournament for the Under 19 World Championship to be held in Egypt and Italy next year.

Our gold medal win in the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio was a significant return on Government's investment in our ruggers and a true testament to our ongoing collaborative work with all of our stakeholders and sporting federations in Fiji. We created history by winning the first ever Sevens Rugby gold medal and instantly became an online hit as searches for Fiji reached record popularity. This has proven to us and the rest of the world what we in Fiji already know that Fiji's sporting brand is marketable internationally. Every penny spent by Government towards sports development locally and internationally will surely have immense benefits for our economy.

Madam Speaker, allow me to elaborate on Government's support through the Fiji National Sports Commission for the disabled and special needs community. Madam Speaker, no Government in our history has done more to give people living with disabilities greater access to opportunities than this Government. I am extremely proud to see the amount of efforts and resources that have been set aside to place people living with disabilities into the mainstream of society. I can tell you as a disabled person that never before has such focus mainstreaming taken place, not only in the arena of sports, but across every level of socio-economic development.

It is always great to see disabled people pushing their passions, regardless of whatever challenges they face in life. We saw that happen again with student, Naomi Lewakita's inspiring reading of our Constitution in Braille. This Government understands that every step we take forward as a nation must be a step taken together and Naomi's performance was a epitome of the kind of opportunities that an inclusive, equitable environment can help create for our young people.

Last year, the Commission helped to fund Fiji's first ever participation at the Special Olympic World Games in Los Angeles, an event initiated by Kennedy-Shriver Foundation in the 1970s for athletes with intellectual impairments. Fiji sent six athletes and returned with eight medals, including four gold medals.

The Commission also provided funding to Paralympics Fiji to host its 2015 National Games in Suva and funded two of our para-athletes travel to the Australian National Para Table Tennis Cup earlier this year as part of their preparation for the Rio Paralympic games, which finished just over a week ago.

The Commission also supported Fiji participation in the 2014 Pan Pacific Games for the Deaf and will support our deaf athletes participation in this year's Australian Deaf Games, a qualifier for Deaflympics in 2017.

In the same way we mainstreamed those living with disabilities, we must also ensure that none of our young people are left behind from sports outreach, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or geographical location because every boy and girl in Fiji can up their participation in athletes activities and enjoy the benefits of a more active lifestyle. So in the upcoming year, we will redouble our efforts to engage with all of our communities with inclusion at the top of the priority list. The Commission has continued to conduct coaching clinics and basic sports awareness programmes in rural and urban communities around Fiji.

This year, Commission established a fitness leader programme that identify leaders in villages who are trained to conduct fitness and physical activity programmes in their community in an effort to help combat non-communicable diseases (NCD's). To-date, 67 fitness leaders have been trained and appointed to villages in Macuata, Cakaudrove, Bua, Namosi, Serua and Nadroga.

Madam Speaker, I am delighted that my Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to ensure that physical education is a key lesson taught to our children. We recognise the need to ensure that there are proper Physical Education lessons offered so that our children are able to develop athletes skills and keep themselves fit.

Through physical education and sports, we also learn how to win and lose graciously, how to play as a team, how to recognise our strengths and weaknesses and how to focus. There is no doubt that we have immense talent in our country but we need to harness that and instil a sense of discipline. Having been an elite athletes and hoping to be one again, I can describe first-hand the sacrifices that need to be made in order to achieve and represent Fiji well.

With support from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, we are working to provide physical education in our special schools and for those children with impairments in mainstream schools. It is through such teamwork that we will create more opportunities for our disabled community and promote inclusive society rooted in equality.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Sports Awards Committee has recognised the contributions of two people involved in sport for the disabled at this year's ceremony. Molly Esther of Special Olympics Fiji was awarded the prestigious 2015 Fiji Tattslotto Sportswoman of the of the year's award. The

second, Special Olympics Administrator, Mr. Bishwa Nadan Sidal was recognised as a Sports Administrator of the year. This is indeed a boost for Special Olympics and Disabled Sports Federation throughout the country. Government and the Ministry will continue to foster an environment for disabled members of our community to excel in sports and other areas in life. We are investigating the possibility of hosting the 2017 Pacific Special Olympic, a first for the region and Fiji. If we do this, Fiji will yet again make history and become a champion for disabled athletes in the region.

Madam Speaker, I just recently returned from the Summer Paralympic Games in Rio and I thank the Government again for its support towards our Paralympians. I became Fiji's first Minister to be given the honour to present medals at the Paralympic Games. I was humbled to represent Fiji and put our country in the spotlight in front of an estimated audience of 4 billion people over the 11 days of competition.

One of the ways to acknowledge the value and achievements of people living with disabilities is through increased media coverage. I hope to see and read about our disabled athletes on a regular basis including at the Paralympics, Deaflympics and Special Olympic Games. This is a challenge I put to our media houses in Fiji because it is what our athletes deserve as we work to change the public's perceptions of our disabled community.

Madam Speaker, we support the need to combat our NCD problem head on and use sport as a socio-economic advancement tool that promotes national unity. To do this, we need a strategy to ensure that new schools include a Multi-purpose facility as part of the initial design and that an appropriate space is allocated for this. We should ensure adequate equipment is available for both new and current schools. We need to out a proper sporting facilities in every school and my Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Education to do so. These facilities should also be made available to the community including those living with disabilities so that we can keep entire communities active and give our young people a constructive avenue outside of school hours.

We need to develop more creative ways to leverage the power of sport, to ensure that the private sector supports our talented athletes if we want to build upon our international success. To date, we have provided a tax rebate of 150 percent, in some instance and private sector is looking for further increases. However, the marketing benefits derived by sponsors should contribute to a real public-private partnership developed for the benefit of our athletes. Perhaps a more realistic incentive approach can be sought through discussion and debate. my Ministry will be reaching out to sports organisations and the private sectors to move this forward.

Sports can and does contribute to the economy through the construction of facilities, the selling of merchandise, providing employment opportunities and bringing in flows of income during the hosting of events. With increased economic development through sports and physical activity, we can foster the inclusion of marginalised groups, improve our health and cement our national identity.

My Ministry, alongside the Sports Commission, Fiji Sports Council, other sporting organisation and other ministries form a powerful team that can harness the power of sports for the benefit of our nation. We have our work cut out for us, as we reinforce the success of our Sevens Team and expand what we have learnt to other sports and professions.

We have to defend our world title next year and Olympic titles in four years' time. I can attest to the fact that time will pass quickly, so we have to match that pace and begin preparations. We have no time to lose.

To conclude, the Ministry recognises sports as a key contributor to the economic growth, social inclusion and national unity. With the rise in the number of Fijians affected by NCDs, the promotion of sports and athletic activity is more important than ever. And I hope to see our Gold Medal will inspire many of our young people to become more active and adopt healthier lifestyles. Of course, sports is also a major industry, with the potential to generate huge revenues and employment opportunities for our athletes.

Madam Speaker, allow me to conclude by reaffirming my belief that sports are an extremely effective development tool that creates pathways for our young people to secure their future, and the future of the country. As stated by His Excellency, it is our duty to provide young Fijians with every opportunity to have prosperous and satisfying future, and that is a responsibility my Ministry will strive every day to meet. *Vinaka vakalevu* and God Bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we move on to the next Speaker, we have in the gallery a third group of students from the University of Fiji, Saweni Campus. You are very welcome and thank you for your interest in your Parliament.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers and fellow Members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I raise to join other Honourable Members before me, in thanking His Excellency the President for His most gracious Address delivered in this august House on 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2016. Madam Speaker, the President according to Section 81 (4) of the Constitution shall open the Annual Session of Parliament, with an address outlining the proceeds and programmes of the Government. Unfortunately Madam Speaker, His Excellency, the President's address fell short of this Constitutional requirement. I did not blame His Excellency for this, shortcoming as the change of the Parliamentary Calendar allowed the Budgetary session to precede via opening of Parliament. I will continue Madam Speaker, I will confine my comments Madam Speaker on the very few important issues, His Excellency the President touched upon. I commend His Excellency for reminding us as Members of Parliament that we have reached the mid-point of our four year Parliamentary Term. He reminded us to, take stock of our performance so far, to review the progress we have made as a Parliament and as a nation, and to reflect on ways in which we can improve our quality of service to the Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, I wish to quote from the *Bible*, from the Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 6 verses 16, "the Lord said to his people, stand at the cross road and look, ask for the ancient paths and where the birth road is, follow it, and you will live in peace. But they said, "no we will not". We all know Madam Speaker, the fate of Israel and the Israelites when they rejected the Lords way. Madam Speaker, the best way forward for this nation and its people, is the Lord's way.

Madam Speaker, the last two years has been a journey of learning and varied experiences after we have regained our Parliamentary democracy, after eight long years, in the Political Wilderness. Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President, also reminded us as Members of Parliament that we owe our allegiance to the Fijian people, we have solemnly sworn to uphold. Madam Speaker, most of the time, the people have a misconception, that the Government or the establishment has the power to do things against their will, their wishes and are afraid to voice their opinions and express their views. In fact Madam Speaker, it should be the other way around. The Government should be afraid of the people. The people have the power in their hands. They can put the Government in power, and also remove a Government from power. On the Government's Legislative Programme for the coming year Madam Speaker, I thank His Excellency the President for highlighting this Programme, and indicating the new laws that will be introduced and existing laws, to be reviewed.

Madam Speaker from the inception of Parliament in 2014, 118 Bills have found their passage, through this august House. Those comprise of 28 in 2014, 38 in 2015 and 51 in 2016. Of those 118 Bills, Madam Speaker, 42 had passed under Standing Order 51 (1) and (2). While some Bills necessarily had to go through section 51 Madam Speaker, the rest need to have gone through the normal process, where they should be properly scrutinised by the relevant Standing Committee and Members of the General Public.

Madam Speaker, Parliament is a Peoples House, and it is tasked to make laws for the people. It is therefore imperative Madam Speaker, that Bills should be properly scrutinised and debated before being passed into Laws. Rushing some Bills through Section 51, Madam Speaker, brings suspicion and poses a lot of questions as to what exactly the objective is.

For the laws to be reviewed, Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that some laws which, I think are critical for our economic development are not in this Review List. There are also new laws, that are critical to our development and need to be introduced, but are also not in this Review List. Madam Speaker, I wish to dwell on these laws, on why I think they should be given priorities.

The Mining Act, Madam Speaker, lately there has been a wide interest in the Mining Industry. Currently the Government has, issued 67 Special Prospective Licences, 16 of those are for off shore exploration. Of the 51 licenses, for mineral prospecting, 3 are of intensive explorations. Madam Speaker, SPLs are issued by the Department of Mineral Resources, these licenses cover wide track of land most of which are *iTaukei*, land, which the Mineral Resources Department, or the Government has no jurisdiction over. This is a clear violation of Property Rights. It is often said, Madam Speaker, that processes be expedited for the benefits of the nation's economic development. While the intension maybe genuine Madam Speaker, the rights of *iTaukei* Land owners, or any landowners for that matter should be respected and not be comprised. It is often said that almost and almost demanded that the *iTaukei* should free up their land for National Economic Developments. The *iTaukei* have always been giving, giving, giving and giving and the Government and other citizens have benefited immensely from the generosity.

What have they got in return? Only crumbs from the Nations Cake from the Government's table. Often they are blamed for being 'resource rich and cash poor.'

Madam Speaker, the *iTaukei* Landowners have played their path in Nation building in good faith and the Government should reciprocate. There are insignificant economic standing in society compared to their rich natural resources, is a clear indication that they have been inadequately compensated giving their resources for National Economic Developments.

Madam Speaker, whenever this side of the house brings out issues concerning the *iTaukei*, and no matter how genuine they maybe, we would be branded as racist, nationalistic, radical, portraying to destabilize the nation.

This is about time, Madam Speaker, that the Government address these genuine issues of national concern.

Madam Speaker, this is why I feel that the review of the Mining Act should be included in this year's Legislative Programme and given some priority.

The Rivers and Stream Act, Madam Speaker, due to the Extensive Government Programme of road construction, the demand for River Gravel Extraction and Quarrying Licences had substantially increased.

The River and Stream Act which is very old, stipulates that soil under the water belongs to the state. The High Court decision in the TLTB versus JP Bayly Case ruled in favour with *iTaukei*

landowners. This Madam Speaker, has created confusion as to who should issue River Gravel Extraction Licences, the Lands Department or *iTaukei* Lands Trust Board. A classic example Madam Speaker, are the two sites in the upper Navua river which we visited on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, 2016. Those two sites are only meters apart. The Standard Concrete Industry Limited (SCIL) licence was issued by the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board and the Earthworks Limited licence was issued by the Lands Department.

Another prominent issue within this industry, Madam Speaker, is the disparity of royalty charges levied by the two institutions. The *iTaukei* Land Trust Board charges \$6.61 a cubic meter, while the Lands Department charges \$2 per cubic meter. It is Lands Department policy to share the royalty with the landowners to get 50 percent each. When the charge was \$1.00, the Government took 50 cents and 50 cents went to the landowners. However when the rate was reviewed to \$2, the Government took \$1.50 and the landowners share remain at 50 cents. This is a policy matter Madam Speaker, and common sense should prevail when implementing it.

Another concern is whether this amount has been paid to the landowners over the years as we understand all revenues are paid directly to Consolidated Fund.

While the above two companies, Madam Speaker, are raking in millions of dollars from these resources, the owners of the resources in the nearby village of Nakavu, continue to live in substandard conditions. These are the issues which should be addressed in reviewing of these laws.

Another entity, Madam Speaker that was affected by the same issues is the Gold Rock Investment Limited Project in Dawasamu, Tailevu. This company has already invested \$18 million in the project. This is a tax free zone and the problem this company had gone through and exposed the lack of coordination between the various Government arms, facilitating the approval process for this type of investments.

If the Government is really serious about attracting investors, then it should ensure that proper legislations are in place and the processors are transparent, efficient and effective. This project is the best thing that has happened in this part of Tailevu North. It has created much needed employment to the youth in the area. I have always emphasized, Madam Speaker, the need for a look Tailevu North Policy. It has enormous potentials but underdeveloped.

Madam Speaker, Dawasamu is now famous for the miracle water spring, again this is another classic example of the nation benefitting from the *iTaukei* resources. The landowners are adamant that they do not charge any fee for the water as they believe it will take away its manna. The place has been visited by people from all over the country and even some from overseas.

Madam Speaker, I think the Government should step in and assist the *iTaukei* landowners economically by assisting them in providing infrastructure for catering purposes to provide for the thousands of people that have visited the place. This is why I feel that the review of the River and Stream Act should be included in this year's legislative programme. There are more people flocking into this area than going to the hospital.

New Laws to be introduced -.Mineral Water Extraction: Madam Speaker, mineral water extraction and bottling are a growing business in the country. After the success of Fiji Water, more investors have entered this market. The water bottling industry contributes more Government revenue than mining. The number of investors in this industry keeps growing but there is no legislations governing their operations. The sites normally have large areas of land mostly *iTaukei* land for catchment areas. It is important that legislation be introduced so all stakeholders interests, especially resource owners are taken care of.



Fair Share of Royalty: Under Section 30 (1) of the Constitution, the owners of any particular land (whether customary or freehold), or of any particular registered customary fishing rights shall be entitled to receive a fair share of royalties or other money paid to the State in respect of the grant by the State of Rights to extract minerals from that land or the seabed in the area of those fishing rights.

Under Section 30 (2), a written law may determine the framework for calculating fair share under sub section (1).

Madam Speaker, the Parliament had already turned two (2) years old and yet no new law regarding this issue being introduced. With the increased activities in the mining industry, it is only proper that this law be introduced. The landowners of Nawailevu village in Bua are still awaiting the payment of their fair share of royalty after approximately two years after their land had been mined or bauxite. This can only be facilitated if a new law is passed.

This is the very reason, Madam Speaker, I was suggesting that the introduction of this new law be included in this year's legislative programme.

The Effects of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*: From the effects of TC Winston over our country, it is unfortunate that 10 months on, the victims are still struggling to put their lives together. In the devastated areas especially in Tailevu North and the Ra coastal areas, people are still struggling to clear their land of fallen trees in order to engage in some meaningful cultivation. Some are still living in tents and some have taken the initiative to build their own homes, with local timber resources.

We are indeed fortunate Madam Speaker, of the assistance of our many friends in the international Community, Government, organisations and individuals. If not for their generosity, we would still be lagging behind and struggling to clean up the mess from the devastation left by *TC Winston*.

Madam Speaker, despite the Government zero-rated duty on imported basic building material, it has not been reflected on the retail price as it continues to rise.

Seven Olympic Gold Medal: On the gold medal our Rugby Sevens Team brought back from Rio, I have been one of the Members from this side of the House that had suggested in the last two budgetary sessions that the money allocated to the International Golf Tournament be allocated to the Sevens Rugby Team. They had won back to back World Championships and now the gold medal in Rio. They had promoted Fiji to the rest of the world. It would have been a worthy investment. Budgeting is all about allocating money where the return is high and the impact massive. We did not even have a golf representative in Rio. Why we were not represented? Now everyone is getting into the Fiji Sevens bandwagon, even the International Golf Tournament organisers.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Rugby Sevens Team success especially show for our young athletes, I am sure that you will get more medals in next Olympic game.

On Education, Madam Speaker, and I quote from His Excellency The President's address when he said:

“First and foremost in my Government's mind is to empower more of our young people through its Education Revolution.”

Madam Speaker, I do not know whether our Education system is revolving, evolving or revolting?

(Laughter)

As a young man, Madam Speaker, I joined the civil service at the end of the Colonial era. All our bosses were expatriates, mostly from England, Australia and New Zealand. After, we gained Independence there was a slow process of localization.

As a young civil servant, I was challenged to reach the position previously held by expatriates bosses. It was an inspiration. Now, Madam Speaker, with the Government's pursuit to become a modern national state, the wheels have started to turn backwards. We now have expatriate Permanent Secretaries, Magistrates and Judges. What struck me on the Opening Day of Parliament. Madam Speaker was that all the judges sitting up there, except for one are all expatriates.

Are our local lawyers not good enough to be judges? We have had local judges before, like Justice Tuivaga, Jitoko, Fatiaki, Mishra, Pathik, to name a few and they all did a sterling job.

What is wrong with our education system? Are our local universities turning out Degrees that are not recognisable internationally?

What is amazing about the whole situation, Madam Speaker, is no matter if you have an overseas qualification or more qualified than expatriates, but if you are a local you are more unlikely to get the top job. But the ones that got the top jobs was not because of they are qualified but because they are well connected.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and this leads to the end of the items in today's Order Paper. I thank you all Honourable Members for your contributions to the debate today and I wish you restful evening.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 3.22 p.m.