

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 2017

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 2017

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable M.D. Bulitavu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 6th February, 2017 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Launching of the Parliament of Fiji Handbook

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I would like to inform Honourable Members that we will be having the launch of the *Parliament of Fiji Handbook* during the lunch break in the Big Committee Room.

Business Committee Meeting

Honourable Members, immediately after the launch, the Honourable Members of the Business Committee are requested to meet in the Small Committee Room.

Welcome – Members of the Public

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

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence –
Review Report on the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic
Communications in International Contracts 2005

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present this Report of the Fiji Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which was assigned to review and examine the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts 2005.

This Report provides a summary and examination of written and oral submissions received at the Committee meetings commencing from 12th October, 2016. The Report is divided into four Parts:

1. Part 1 – covers the role and responsibilities of the Standing Committee and the inquiry process in undertaking a review of the Convention;
2. Part 2 – provides a brief overview of the Convention;
3. Part 3 – details the Standing Committee’s observation and Convention; and
4. Part 4 – provides a summary of key provisions of the Convention.

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, Section 70 and the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, Chapter 10, Clause 109(2)(e) and Clause 110(1)(c) which stipulates the roles and functions of Parliamentary Standing Committees in order to enhance the transparency of and accountability by public agencies and officials. The Standing Committee received public submissions in the Parliament precincts and in the Western Division.

On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Committee, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the organisations, Government Ministries and individuals, who made submissions and/or attended public hearings. I also wish to extend my acknowledgment to the Honourable Members of the Committee and the Secretariat Staff for their commitment and worthy contribution for the completion of this bipartisan Report.

The Honourable Members include the:

1. Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu (Deputy Chairperson);
2. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu (Member); and
3. Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua (Member).

The Alternate Members include the:

1. Honourable Jilila Kumar;
2. Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata;
3. Honourable Viliame Gavoka;
4. Honourable Salote Radrodro;
5. Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki; and
6. Honourable Howard Politini.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

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

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence –
Review Report on the World Trade Organisation Facilitation Agreement

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- I am pleased to present this Report on the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement of the Fiji Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which was assigned to review and examine the Agreement.

This Report provides the summary and analysis of written and oral submissions received at the Committee Meetings, commencing from 12th October, 2016. The Report is divided into four Parts:

1. Part 1 – covers the role and responsibility of the Standing Committee and the inquiry process in undertaking the review of the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement;
2. Part 2 – provides a brief overview of the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement;
3. Part 3 – details the Standing Committee’s observations and areas of concern; and
4. Part 4 – provides a summary of the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement.

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, Section 70 and the Standing Orders of Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, Chapter 10, Clause 109 (2) (e) and Clause 110 (1) (c) which stipulates the role and functions of the Parliamentary Standing Committees in order to enhance transparency of and accountability by public agencies and officials. The Standing Committee received public submissions in the Parliament precincts and in the Western Division.

On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Committee, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the Government Ministries, organisations and individuals, who made their submission or attended public hearings.

The outcome of the wide consultation undertaken and submission received from key stakeholders provided the Standing Committee with an in-depth Report of the World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreement.

I also wish to extend my appreciation to the Honourable Members of the Committee and the Secretariat Staff for their commitment and worthy contributions towards the completion of this bipartisan Report. The Honourable Members of Committee include the:

1. Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu (Deputy Chairperson);

2. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu (Member); and
3. Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua (Member).

The Alternate Members include the:

1. Honourable Jilila Kumar;
2. Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata;
3. Honourable Viliame Gavoka;
4. Honourable Salote Radrodro;
5. Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki; and
6. Honourable Howard Politini.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.
(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to again, have the floor.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Review Report of the Protocol
Amending the WTO Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights 2005

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- I am pleased to present this Report of the Fiji Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Review of the Protocol amending the World Trade Organisation Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (WTO-TRIPS) 2005.

This Report provides a summary and examination of written submissions and oral evidences received at the Committee Meetings during 12th October, 2016 to 25th November, 2016. The Report is divided into four Parts:

1. Part 1 - covers the role and responsibility of the Standing Committee and the inquiry process undertaken;
2. Part 2 - provides a brief overview of the WTO-TRIPS Agreement and the Protocol amending the Agreement;
3. Part 3 - outlines the Standing Committee's observations and areas of concern; and
4. Part 4 - provides the Committee's conclusion.

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, Section 70, requires Parliament to establish committees to scrutinize Government administration, examine Bills and subordinate legislation, and undertake other functions as required under the rules and orders of Parliament. One of the functions of the Standing Committee as stipulated in Standing Order 110(e) is to review international treaties and conventions ratified by Government and monitor their implementation.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence undertook the inquiry into the amendment of the WTO-TRIPS Agreement with the view of ensuring that changes would be in the national interest and benefit all Fijians.

On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Committee, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the organisations, Government Ministries and individuals who made submissions and/or attended public hearings. The outcome of the consultation and submissions from key stakeholders provided the Committee with necessary information and insights to be able to provide its report and opinion on Parliament's proposed ratification of the Amending Protocol of the WTO-TRIPS Agreement.

I also wish to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the Committee and the Secretariat staff for their commitment and contribution that have resulted in the completion and tabling of this bi-partisan Report. The Honourable Members who participated in this inquiry were the:

1. Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu (Deputy Chairperson);
2. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu (Member); and
3. Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua (Member).

During the course of the Committee's inquiry, the Alternate Members who participated were the:

1. Honourable Jilila Kumar;
2. Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata;
3. Honourable Viliame Gavoka;
4. Honourable Salote Radrodro;
5. Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki; and
6. Honourable Howard R. Politini.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

We now move on to the next Item in the Order Paper, I invite the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask his question.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Security Measures – Smuggling of Arms and Ammunition (Question No. 13/2017)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security advise this House on the security measures in place to prevent any further smuggling of arms and ammunition into the country?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA (Minister for Defence and National Security).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I would like to, first of all, thank him for his question.

In terms of existing national laws, we have in place the Customs Act 1986, the Customs Prohibited Import and Export Regulations 1986 and the Arms and Ammunitions 2003 that regulate arms transfer across borders.

At our main ports of entry, in particular, Nadi Airport, we have x-ray machines, K-9 Units manned by Customs and Police on 24/7. Fiji's membership with INTERPOL enhances the border law agencies to access INTERPOL i-24/7 network, a prompt international platform system that enables the rapid sharing of required data.

Madam Speaker, Fiji, as you know is a country with more than 330 islands and 30 percent are inhabited and susceptible to arms smuggling into the country. Law enforcement agencies have limited physical presence in sufferance ports, maritime islands and marinas restricting human intervention.

The Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) assists the Ministry in their current software platform, the Automated Information System (AIS), that monitors all vessels that possess transponders.

Madam Speaker, the ensuing National Security Strategy (NSS) is in its consultation phase and it is envisaged to realign and harness all security mechanisms and stakeholders of Government by June 2018.

Madam Speaker, if I may just say here what Government has done so far. The implementation of the NSS will enable the clear sharing of information and the ability to access the required element to enhance detection in various aspects. Government's initiative is to firstly create awareness and provide a significant level of empowerment and responsibility in the village level. This effectively translates to educating the communities of their contribution towards national security.

Government has strengthened the K-9 capability in the overseas training of personnel and the recruitment of overseas canine kennels. Government has purchased x-ray machines for containers at our two main sea ports of entry and also 3D capability x-ray machines at our major airport.

The Ministry continues to consult with certain private entities that are equipped to provide acute aerial monitoring and clear surveillance to our maritime and law enforcement agencies.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite your comments from the floor. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Minister will know, it is confirmed, even by the latest finding that a lot of these smugglings are coming through our waters. Given that they have racked one of our naval boats, through their own negligence, what assurance does the nation have that our coastal waters will be secure?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, let me just assure the Honourable Member that our border agencies are very active and they are working on making sure that these smuggling of arms and ammunition into Fiji is controlled.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vadei?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister assure this House and the people of Fiji that all arms and ammunitions that were smuggled into the country were all recovered?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, I can assure the Honourable Member that we are in the process of working very hard to make sure that the arms and ammunitions coming into the country are caught and are taken care of.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, my question is, whether the Ministry has any measures to address internal security, which is probably worse than the arms and ammunition, and is through vicious character defamation and distribution of pamphlets which occurred this morning in Naboubuco, Nadaravakawalu, Lutu, Muaira and escaping through Monasavu towards the other side of Fiji? That is to the opinion that it is more threatening internally than arms and ammunition.

HON. SPEAKER.- The onus is on the Honourable Minister to answer that question, which is unrelated to this question, but the onus is on him.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata to ask his question.

Rehabilitation Programme for *TD04F* Victims
(Question No. 14/2017)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management advise this House what rehabilitation programme has been put in place for the *TD04F* victims?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for the question raised on the rehabilitation concerning *TD04F*.

Madam Speaker, it is an opportunity for me as well as Minister responsible for disaster management, perhaps just to highlight some of the threats and risks related to the climate that we are going through.

The Honourable Prime Minister talked about climate change yesterday. You would have seen in today's dailies and I had also received a report from the Commissioner Western yesterday as Parliament was sitting, about the heavy rainfall in the Western Division. This is something that we, in this august House, and the members of the public need to be aware of, the changing weather pattern.

Yesterday, we had rainfall of about 100 millimetres to 174 millimetres, which is basically about two weeks' rainfall within a period of 24 hours. During *TD04F*, we recorded about 500

millimetres to 800 millimetres, even to the extent of 911 millimetres of rainfall, which is rainfall for about three months, within a period of about seven days.

I remember during *TC Evans* in 2012, the upper areas in Nadarivatu where most of the streams originate and flow through the low lying areas, were recording 60 millimetres to 100 millimetres of rainfall even within an hour. So that sends a very strong message and it is important for all of us, particularly Fijians to be aware of this, and that we need to take proactive measures. It poses a lot of challenges to our development programmes as well and the existing infrastructure, so in terms of our adaptation programmes and even mitigation to some extent, this is something that we will have to consider seriously.

So yesterday, Madam Speaker, 100 millimetres to 174 millimetres of rainfall was recorded which is like two weeks of rainfall within 24 hours. Such will be the norm in as far as climate change is concerned, extreme hot periods and likewise intense rainfall within short durations as well which will cause flooding.

Madam Speaker, in reply to the question raised this morning, again on our post-disaster operations and rehabilitation which is the specific question raised this morning, is the last component of the whole post-disaster activities. First is about saving lives in our initial response, and then we stabilise and sustain lives, and then rehabilitation is the last component and when we are talking about timeframes, Madam Speaker, in best practices, rehabilitation usually kicks in, the latest from the six months period or earliest best cases, from three months after a disaster.

Madam Speaker, for Fiji, most of the low lying areas were affected. As per the recommendation of Government officials, there was no declaration for a state of natural disaster but that does not mean that there were no responses organised. As the weather situation was developing, the team at hand - NDMO and, of course, the respective Divisions and agencies that are responsible, did activate their emergency operation centres.

Mainly the low lying areas, Madam Speaker, were affected and in some instances, particularly related to infrastructure because of the high level of water within certain geographical regions that caused some landslides and that affected some of our utilities as well, particularly power lines and roads, as the most evident is the slip at Logani in Tailevu.

Of course, we are all aware of Qamea and I will not go into the details. Qamea is, perhaps the most affected of all our rural communities. We also have reports from Sawaieke in Gau about the school and, of course, Yadua in Bua. We are compiling a detailed report and in the next sitting of Cabinet, Madam Speaker, we will provide the detailed report and that will then decide the rehabilitation programme that will kick in probably from March at the earliest. But let me highlight the activities that we have undertaken so far.

Let me talk on the Qamea landslide, we did respond. The DO Taveuni managed to go very early at 5 o'clock in the morning, the day after the landslide, just to go and get an initial assessment. Then we took a team from Sukanaivalu Barracks just to give us some engineering assessment and we are thankful to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport for providing Government vessels that took the team across for the initial assessment whereby the team was working there for the last two weeks, including rations.

Again, it was about saving lives and it is about stabilising and sustaining. On that, Madam Speaker, we have relocated the Health Centre. We have a temporary health centre at this stage and likewise, we have done so with the school. We have fixed their water needs and, of course, we have provided them with ration, and some fruits to sustain them. Most importantly was on psychosocial

support that was undertaken by a non-government organisation, together with the Ministry of Health officials because people were traumatised. People were in an ambivalent state, therefore, the psychosocial support is very, very critical for the people in Qamea and I am thankful that they have managed to recover over time. We will see them performing to the best and hopefully, living a normal happy life as well on the island.

For agriculture, I will talk specifically on agriculture because I did promise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that we will give more details because of a written question which she has kindly withdrawn.

On agriculture, Madam Speaker, we had then an estimated damage of around \$11.7 million, compared to the more than a quarter million that we had in *TC Winston*. We, in the Ministry of Agriculture, are probably ahead of the other agencies because some of these short and medium term crops and interventions, I can say that we are already into the recovery and the rehabilitation mode because it is within our influence, Madam Speaker. Again, Wainimala, Waidina and Wainibuka which are all low-lying areas were badly affected and, of course, the Saivou Valley in the Ra area, Burenitu and the surrounding areas.

We have given assistance in the form of seeds, suckers and planting materials and, of course, for those who had a lot of silt in their land, we are able to provide them with assistance as well on land clearing, land cultivation and even some drainage work if need be. That assistance was published in the papers so that people can also be aware.

Madam Speaker, for livestock farmers, we gave them feed because most of the feed were wet, even to help maintain animal welfare, and, of course, medication as well so that the health and hygiene of animals were not affected. We also helped in the infrastructure. Some had their fencing damaged, so we provided them with assistance in specific areas as well. Otherwise, for the initial response, FEA had done its part and likewise, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and other service providers - Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, I have briefly touched on particularly, my two Ministries that have control over the initial response to Qamea Island and, of course, what the Ministry of Agriculture is doing. However, specific to the question raised this morning on rehabilitation, I will be submitting a report to Cabinet and then we will determine the long-term rehabilitation programme but probably it will just cover the work on health and education with the communities of Qamea Island because the other agencies are basically undertaking their own responses.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite questions from the House, if any. Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; I hear a lot of rehabilitation programmes but something that I specifically want to know is, does this rehabilitation programme also include rehabilitating those homes and furniture that were under water and destroyed during the tropical depression?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, of course, homes in terms of dwelling houses, that will be part of our part of our submission to Government. However, when it comes to their household items, if they have insurance, well and good but then we have NGOs, we also have some leftovers and donations from previous cyclones, *TC Winston* particularly, where we have distributed cooking pots, blankets, et cetera, that we have available with us.

However, in the long term, I will cover this as well, Madam Speaker, particularly for farmers. We started work in 2014 on looking at insurance programmes to cover our farmers because of the continuing devastation in the agriculture sector. Such is agriculture, high risk, but to help maintain the interests of the farmers, we are looking seriously into this.

Under our Country Programme Framework with Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), we started this work in 2014. There was a consultant given to us by FAO and, of course, we had Dr. Niumaia Tabunakawai, who assisted and being the former Permanent Secretary, he has local knowledge. From that report, Madam Speaker, FAO has taken that to another level and we have a group currently undertaking that review in terms of Agriculture Insurance. As we speak, the Chairman of the Crop and Livestock Council, Mr Simon Cole, is in Manila this week (starting today) attending a workshop on Agriculture Insurance.

We have Julian Roberts from Willis Towers Watson, a UK-based consultancy specialising in Agriculture Insurance and was selected by FAO. We have a Bill Higginson of Insurance Holdings and we have our Insurance Holdings representative here in Fiji, two locals - Simon and Neville Koop, who is very much involved in weather forecasting. They are doing the consultancy work now and hopefully we can come up with an Agriculture Insurance Policy for our farmers.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply.

Madam Speaker, I do not know whether it is Fiji's climate change or God is angry with this nation because there have been frequent occurrences of these natural disasters. I want to ask the Honourable Minister, is there a plan to ensure that there are alternative roads or routes in all places? For example, in the Kasavu slip, luckily we have the Bau Tikina Road, otherwise there is very little way to come to Nausori. Is there a holistic plan to address this problem?

HON. SPEAKER.- Unfortunately, you did not ask the question on time. I will now give the floor to the Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for outlining the rehabilitation programme for TDO4F. Only yesterday, we witnessed flash flooding in Nadi, Rakiraki and other parts of the Western Division.

Madam Speaker, a lot of flash flooding is due to blocked drains from agricultural holdings which flow into the urban areas. My question to the Honourable Minister is, what plans does he have to address this in the short-term, once the rehabilitation programme is continuing?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I did consult my engineers a few weeks back when we had this problem. For Rakiraki particularly, there are a few agencies - we have FRA, FSC, the Drainage Board, Town Council and even the Land and Water Resource Management.

Madam Speaker, I deliberately started off my response this morning on the effects of climate change because I did state that it is going to pose a lot of challenges to our infrastructure. Of course, we are working on the plans to improve on our infrastructure but that will cost money because one of the biggest problems that we have in our drainage systems (according to the engineers that we have) is because we have agriculture drainage and the normal drainage systems for the municipalities,

but there are no flood-controlled drains.

Madam Speaker, there is a big difference between the two. Flood-controlled drains are wider and deeper so that they can contain a lot of water but all that we have is just for the surface water, hoping that it will discharge but it is no longer discharging now and this poses a challenge as well. We are working slowly on that. Of course, the Nadi report has now been submitted to Government.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, my question to the Honourable Minister is on evacuation centres. As we have more natural disasters, there will be more need for evacuation centres. My question is; whether there is adequate provision in his budget to cater for the sustenance of these people who are in evacuation centres, especially for food because there were some concerns on food not being provided in some of the evacuation centres?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the Act does say that when people come to evacuation centres, they are to be provided with food but initially they usually come with some supplies because worse case is, if Government is cut off, then we will not be able to supply.

On evacuation centres, let me also state to the House that the Honourable Prime Minister had directed that we come up with new designs, to be evacuation centre-specific and we have our planning team working on it. You will see that there are some evacuation centres currently constructed and it is by the New Zealand Government, and we hope that we can look at the plans that they have.

On food, Madam Speaker, again, as I have stated Government is responsible but the challenge now is the community-based evacuation centres and the designated evacuation centres. The Act talks about designated evacuation centres and those are usually schools. The report yesterday, we have tried to improve with standby generators and more water tanks now because they are designated evacuation centres.

The problem we are currently facing is with community-based because families will just move from their homes to their uncle's home and then it is termed as an evacuation centre but within a village setting. This is the challenge that we have and we will work with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs on this, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, my question is whether the Ministry or the Government for that matter has an integrated mitigating approach in terms of pre-dredging, pre-drainage and even better engineering works or expertise in making roads because *TD04F* resulted in the Kasavu Slip which means that engineering works and quality come into question. So, that ropes in the Fiji Roads Authority and the Ministry of Public Enterprises. My question is, whether there is any integrated approach to tackle climate change effects because it is not only with the Ministry of Agriculture?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, definitely Government looks seriously at integration where all other agencies are involved, particularly when it comes to technical work. That is why most of this work are currently centralised because we are able to bring the Institute of Engineers, we are able to bring in the engineers from the other agencies so that we can look at particularly improving our risk preparedness. I did state last year that we are shifting from 'reaction to prevention' and thus, this integrated approach is very, very critical and Government is doing that,

Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, it is interesting that Government is looking at building designated evacuation centres whereas the reality of life in Fiji is that, the *vale ni soqo* (community hall) in the villages are predominantly used as evacuation centres which was encouraged by the SDL Government. Now, this Government put a stop to it. Instead of building designated evacuation centres, why do you not just improve on the *vale ni soqos*' (community halls) that are now in every village in Fiji?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, Government did stop the building of community halls because Government had other priorities. It was not stopped simply for the sake of stopping it because priority was on water, education, health, roads - the basic essentials before we come to community halls. Most of the community halls are used for other purposes rather than bringing in development and capacity building in the local communities.

Madam Speaker, in response to the question, we are talking about human rights, and women's and children's welfare. That is why we have to build specifically for evacuation centres because children are being raped in evacuation centres. There are lots of incidences happening in evacuation centres because the children and the women are not separated. That is why we are to look at specifically constructing for these purposes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for the answers that he has given in this august House. As I listened, I could see that there is no way out for the Government. They have exhausted all ideas. So, I would like, Madam Speaker, to ask the Honourable Minister now is the time to turn to God the Creator. Now is the time.

I would like to ask the Honourable Minister whether he could consider putting before the Government for them to seriously consider this because if these kinds of disasters do not stop, then there is no other way. I ask the Honourable Minister whether he would be able to consider putting this before the Government, to put in place a programme and arrangement to take this nation before the mercy of God because at this time we need that. Climate change and championing climate change, Madam Speaker, is not going to address the situation.

HON. LT. COL. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, we are all here at the mercy of God, God is compassionate and God is full of mercy and we all praise God for all that we are going through. In everything give thanks, Amen.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask his question.

Cyclone Rehabilitation Programme – Progress and Implementation
(Question No.15/2017)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- The Ministry's allocation for the year 2016-2017 Estimates totalled a sum of \$3.716 million for Cyclone Rehabilitation under Head 21 Programme 2 Activity 3 SEG 10, and Head 21 Programme 3 Activity 1 SEG 10.

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and National Archives of Fiji advise this House on the progress and implementation of this rehabilitation programme?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and National Archives of Fiji).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, there are two parts to that question, so let me answer the second part which is on Head 21, Programme 3 SEG 10 that deals with Nailou Infant School.

Madam Speaker, the contract was given to Pacific Construction Works and Building Design Limited in 2015 to undertake the construction of that infant school. Unfortunately, the Company Director passed away in 2015 and could not complete the project.

Now, in such circumstances Madam Speaker, when the company is taken over by another person, the other person normally takes over its assets and liabilities. However, the other person who is the new Company Director did not want to honour that particular contract, so the matter went to FICAC and it is under investigation.

At the moment the Ministry, together with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport has done a re-scope of the current project. Tender documents are being prepared and it is due to be advertised soon. So, we anticipate that we probably would be able to get this project off the ground in a months' time.

Madam Speaker, the first part of the question deals with Head 21 Programme 2 Activity 3 SEG 10, that deals with rehabilitation of schools affected by *TC Winston* for a damaged amount less than \$50,000. These related to secondary schools, Early Childhood Education Centres (ECECs), as well as primary schools. This question deals with primary schools that sustained damages worth less than \$50,000.

Madam Speaker, we noted that there were 95 primary schools which sustained damages at that point in time which is less than \$50,000. Out of that 95 primary schools, 31 of them were below \$20,000. So the Ministry decided to look after those schools and ensured that they were completed by the end of last year. Madam Speaker, I will give details from those 31 schools in a second.

Out of the remaining 64 schools, we noted that eight of them were above \$50,000 when the engineers went and did the scoping. Those eight schools are Ahmadiya Primary School, Nadrau District Primary School, Rakiraki District Primary School, Rakiraki Muslim Primary School, Nawaqavesi Primary School, Waibogi Primary School, Viria District School and Naivicula District School. Madam Speaker, these then have to be referred to the Construction Implementation Unit.

Madam Speaker, where are we in respect to the progress? The scoping work has been done by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport Engineers, the architectural designs had been done and it is now at the tender stage for them to see and appoint the contractors. So those are the eight schools, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the remaining 56 schools, these the Ministry of Education had been asked that the scoping work with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport Engineers and these are now the Memorandum of Agreement has been done with the schools, technical specifications have been given to the schools, application or repair forms have been given to the schools from the Rural Local Authority. Now the paper work is with the Ministry of Economy to make direct deposits to the bank account of the schools.

Madam Speaker, let me give the names of the schools where the direct deposits will be made, where the schools will be making construction as per the specification, as per the design that we have done. These are:

1. Ratu Nalewavada Public School;
2. Namaka Public School;
3. Votualevu Public School;
4. Nadi District School;
5. Togo Primary School;
6. Masimasi Primary School;
7. Sabeto Muslim Primary School;
8. Lololo Primary School;
9. Viseisei Primary School;
10. Deshbandhu Vitogo School;
11. Dreketi Sangam School;
12. Wesley Methodist School;
13. Qalitu Primary School;
14. Magodro District School;
15. Tuvu Primary School;
16. Wairabetia Muslim School;
17. Lautoka Andhra Sangam School;
18. Vaturu District School;
19. Mulomulo Muslim Primary School;
20. Namara Village School;
21. Lutu District School;
22. Naseva Village School;
23. Ramakrishna Mission School;
24. Waidalice District School;
25. Nairukuruku District School;
26. Vunidawa District School;
27. Nailagobokala Primary School;
28. Naivucini District School;
29. Nadakuni District School;
30. Vanuakula Catholic School;
31. Nausori Village School;
32. Nakurukuruvakatini Primary School;
33. Wailevu West District School;
34. Vatuvula Primary School;
35. St. Pauls Primary School;
36. Khemendra Primary School; and
37. Vuanicau Primary School.

Madam Speaker, for these schools, the Memorandum of Understanding is done, the specification had been given to the school, structural and architectural designs have been done and we have now have submitted the papers for direct deposit into schools' bank account. We are looking at two weeks for this direct deposit to be made to the school to get contractors to undertake these construction.

Madam Speaker, the other category of 31 schools that we have completed using funds from the Ministry, as well as seeking support from NGOs are:

1. Viani Primary School;
2. Navatuvula Primary School;
3. Niusawa Primary School;
4. Khemendra Primary School;
5. Vuanicau Primary School;
6. Holy Cross Primary School;

7. Batinilagi District School;
8. St. Paul's Primary School;
9. Nasavusavu Public School;
10. Nasavusavu Special School;
11. Vunuku Village School;
12. Waitoga Village School;
13. Wakaya Island Primary School;
14. Nukuloa Village School;
15. Navukailagi District School;
16. Davetarua Primary School;
17. Nanuku Sangam School;
18. Nokonoko District School;
19. Mavua District School;
20. Ba School for Special Education;
21. Tagitagi Sangam School;
22. DAV Primary School;
23. Karavi Public School;
24. Tavua Primary School;
25. Naloto District School;
26. Nalotawa District School;
27. Varavu Muslim Primary School;
28. Bulolo Sanatan Dharam School;
29. Naruku Primary School;
30. Rarawai Muslim School; and
31. Ucunivanua District School.

Madam Speaker, we have completed the construction of those 31 schools and classes are happening at this moment.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will now invite questions from the floor. Honourable Mikaele Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his response. I note from his response that he has mentioned something about special schools being rehabilitated and hope there are provisions.

I would like to ask the Honourable Minister, if there are provisions for these special schools, in terms of their rehabilitation because of the nature of their disabilities? Are there any provisions made in terms of building the schools to accommodate the disabilities in these schools?

HON. DR. M.REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the special schools that we have are designed for children with special disabilities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- On the way from Rakiraki to Nausori, Rakiraki High School has no roof, but tents. St. Francis Primary School, the same situation; Ra High School face the same situation. Tobu Primary School, no roof. I know it was stated here as well as elsewhere that all these will be ready before the school term starts. Note, Sir, you had three months away from the end of the year with all these allocations. With all these delays and failures, can the Honourable Minister please apologise to the parents for the rain, for the tent and for the sun?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. This session really is only for questions and not for apologised questions.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is my question, can he please apologise?

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I am afraid what transpires within Parliament has to be responded to in Parliament and we are not responding to people outside of Parliament.

There being no other supplementary questions, I now give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj.

Employment of More Locum Doctors
(Question No.16/2017)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform the House on why the Ministry is employing more Locum doctors?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for the question.

Madam Speaker, locums are typically doctors who work in private practice or who have recently retired from Government Services. This may include general practitioners who provide support in areas, such as accident and emergency, pediatrics and specialists who work in hospital Inpatient and Outpatient Departments, and can also offer available mentoring for their younger colleagues.

Madam Speaker, in case of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, our use of locums is an excellent example of partnership between public and private health sectors which is actually working well for the Ministry in making a real difference for our patients.

Our locums are helping the Ministry to deliver on its goal of offering prompt access to quality health care for Fijians. And because locums can be called upon to work during hospitals' busiest periods, we have decided to engage locums in our local hospitals, subdivisional hospitals and health centres, with the times they work tailored to meet variations in demand and, of course, we believe they are highly cost-effective.

Since October 2016, Madam Speaker, with the revised rates for the locum appointments, a total of 40 locum doctors have joined the programme - 30 General Practitioners and 10 Specialists. This initiative is co-ordinated by our Ministry in partnership with the Fiji College of General Practitioners.

Based on our current arrangement, the General Practitioners are paid a rate of \$50 an hour, whilst Specialists are paid \$80 an hour. These rates have proven effective in providing an incentive for the General Practitioners and Specialists who are ready to offer their services when and where they are required. In most cases they work during peak hours, normally in the mornings between 6.30 a.m to 10.30 a.m, and then in the evenings from 5.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, since the current programme was launched late last year, we have actually

started to receive reports of shorter waiting times and greater patient satisfaction. There are also benefits through our own doctors, whose workloads have become more manageable.

Through the locum arrangements, the Ministry has been able to support CWM Hospital, Lautoka Hospital, Labasa Hospital, Makoi Health Centre, Samabula Health Centre, Lami Health Centre, Raiwaqa Health Centre, Valelevu Health Centre, Tamavua Twomey Hospital, St. Giles Hospital, as well as Nadi Hospital, Sigatoka Hospital, Namaka Health Centre and Ba Hospital.

Madam Speaker, locum doctors are engaged in delivering services, particularly in the following Departments:

- Accidents and Emergency;
- Anesthetic;
- Physician;
- Obstetrics and Gynecology;
- Eye Unit; and
- Dermatology.

Of course, there is a criteria in place for locum appointments. Applications are made through major and sub-divisional hospitals, and it is made on a need basis. Doctors need to submit their Annual Practitioners Licence with their application forms and other documentation as advised.

On a broader perspective, Madam Speaker, the locum appointments also promotes opportunities for advanced learning, information sharing and broader networking between the doctors in our hospitals and those General Practitioners for enhanced collaboration. Our discussions with the Fiji College of General Practitioners have received positive feedbacks as we continue to see new areas of support and partnership, locum being one of the platforms.

To-date, we have spent a total of \$442,478 on our locum appointments and of course if I may inform the House, this appointment is a short term and a need basis arrangement. Thank you.

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

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; what is the Ministry's plan for the future of these locum doctors or locum appointments?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I believe your question is, what is the long term plan for locum doctors? We have a three-month appointment and based on the performance reviews that we receive from our hospitals and sub-divisional hospitals, we re-engage them for a further three months. Like I said, we will continue to use these arrangements until we are able to meet up with our doctor shortage that we currently face in Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and thank you Honourable Minister for Health for your response, but you did not reflect any disadvantage to the programme. Locum is, sort of, a short-term arrangement to address doctor shortage. What plans does the Ministry have in the long-term to address doctor shortage in the country?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. If I can give you some statistics, currently we have 1,095 Medical Officer positions and to-date we have 595 positions that have been filled. The long-term solution, however, is to ensure that the local institutions meet up with our demands but unfortunately, doctor training programmes range well over five to six years. We have just added about 70 interns to the Service.

The Government also provides scholarships for training of our local people. The Ministry with the Ministry of Civil Service is ongoing with its programme for training in specialist areas. We are also looking at exploring our opportunities to recruit overseas doctors, as I mentioned in my last speech, and we are currently progressing with that.

However, that is not a solution. We are trying to get more doctors out from our local institutions but like I said, it is a long-term process. I agree that locum is a short-term process but doctor shortage has been an ongoing problem for us in Fiji.

HON. MEMBER.- For decades.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Yes, for decades actually.

We are trying to make progress with that and it will eventually take some time. So these are the options available for us to ensure that we continue with our service delivery and ensure that we get the patient satisfaction that we are looking at. It is not an easy thing but we are going to make progress, should we continue with these options that are available to us. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for her reply.

We all know that locum doctors are employed because there is a shortage of doctors. Doctors take about seven years to graduate from the Medical School, and most of them study under Government scholarships. What is the present Government policy on the number of years they should work in Government before they can resign or join other organisations?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I believe there is a bond agreement in place with those doctors who come out of our institutions and they are supposed to serve the bond before they can join GP.

Madam Speaker, on that note as well, we are trying to retain most of our doctors and I hope you are aware that doctors have been given a hefty pay rise, and we believe that with that pay rise we will be able to retain our doctors in Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Politini?

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. What has the impact been since the increase in the numbers of locum doctors?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, one of the biggest impact that we have seen and I have actually been going around visiting these health centres, sub-divisional and divisional hospitals and this is first-hand information that people have given, they say that even one extra locum doctor that comes and serves during the peak hours makes a difference. So, yes, locum doctors do have an impact on our waiting time and it helps us with achieving our patient satisfaction that we are looking at.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Anare Vadei?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for her initiative in meeting the short-term and the long-term challenges. My question is to the current one.

(Laughter)

The Nurse Practitioners and Medical Assistants are doing the duties of doctors in the various Health Centres and they are not properly remunerated. How can the Honourable Minister remunerate these Medical Assistants and Nursing Practitioners?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I believe that is a new question, if it can come as a question at a later date, I will be more than happy to answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, my question is, what is the position of allocating doctors in the rural areas, outer islands and maritime zone because we had an incident in Gau where people were poisoned and I understand that locum are mostly located in urban areas?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, in relation to the question that the Honourable Member has asked, if I may just say, there is a total of 206 health facilities around Fiji, out of which we have three divisional hospitals; two specialized hospitals - St. Giles and Tamavua; 19 subdivisional hospitals, including Rotuma; and we have 84 health centres and 98 nursing stations.

Madam Speaker, our health centres operate at different times for the opening and closing of operations in health centres. Our divisional hospitals and sub-divisional hospitals operate 24/7. Coming back to the doctor allocation, the opening hours for health centres are guided by Section 19 of the Public Hospitals and Dispensaries Act which states, and I quote:

“Out-patients seeking attention at a public hospital or public dispensary shall, unless other arrangements are made in any particular case by a medical officer on the staff of such hospital or dispensary, be seen, except on public holidays, between the hours of 8.30 o'clock in the morning and 1 o'clock in the afternoon and between the hours of 2 o'clock and 4 o'clock in the afternoon on Mondays to Fridays, inclusive, and between the hours of 8.30 o'clock in the morning and 12 noon on Saturdays:”

On that arrangement, Madam Speaker, the health centres have a doctor present and a nursing staff present. Unfortunately, for the case of fish poisoning that has been mentioned, we had allocated doctors, the nurse was there, the doctor had accompanied a sick child for a pediatric case to CWM Hospital and because of bad weather conditions, he was not able to go back. The nurse was there

and constantly in phone contact with the doctor, who advised the nurse what to do and how to go about it.

So the issue here is allocating doctors in rural and maritime areas. As we increase our doctor ratio, obviously our services will increase and we will be able to assign more doctors to these centres.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo?

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, I do thank the Honourable Minister for the response given today. As we all know that shortage of doctors has been going on for some years now. Does the Ministry have plans in mind to extend the retirement age of doctors from 55 years to 60 or 65 years?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.-Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. It is a very interesting question, as you know the retirement age is 55 years but we do re-engage our medical personnel on a case by case basis, especially in terms of the expertise that the country currently lacks.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, the Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister spoke about doctor ratio. Could she assure us that the ratio throughout Fiji is the same? For example, Suva has high density and number per doctor, Nadroga, Nadi and Lautoka; is it uniform or does it vary?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Gavoka for the question. I will be making a Ministerial Statement later in the week and I hope to address your question then.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar to ask her question.

Development of Early Childhood Education Sector
(Question No. 17/2017)

HON. J.N. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and National Archives of Fiji provide an update on how the Early Childhood Education Sector has developed in the past two years in terms of new establishments, provisions for teachers and resources?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and National Archives of Fiji).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank her for asking her question.

Madam Speaker, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a cornerstone to success of our Fijian education system. We are one of the countries in the Pacific region, the smallest region, to recognize and also put resources to ensure that we prepare children well from age five to enter into primary education.

Madam Speaker, there are 942 ECE Centres in Fiji with 1,139 teachers servicing 15,577 ECE students. We have about 16,000 students in Year 1 in the primary school system, which means, if we have 15,577 children in the ECE Centres, it means that we now have pretty much all the children attending ECE Centres. This never used to be before, Madam Speaker, because they could not afford to pay for ECE education, therefore, they were deprived of not having access to ECE education, and came directly to Year 1 in primary schools.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, 102 new ECE Centres were established, while in 2016, 47 new ECE Centres were established. So in response to Honourable Kumar's question, 149 new centres have been established in the past two years in response to Government's resource allocation for tuition waiver as well as teacher salary, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in addition, we financially assisted various schools and communities to set up new ECE Centres, as well as for renovation works to the existing ones. Over the past two years, Madam Speaker, out of these 149 new ECE Centres that came up, we funded 84 ECE projects which included 47 new ECE Centres constructed while 37 Centres were renovated, amounting to \$820,000. So over the last two years, Madam Speaker, we invested \$820,000 to establish new ECE Centres or renovate existing ones to bring it up to the standard so we can look after the little children in a clean environment.

Madam Speaker, our priority assistance in 2015-2016 was basically to rural and maritime schools because in these areas, corporate sector support is pretty much negligent, they are basically reliant on their own contribution or support from Government. So, our assistance was mostly in the rural and maritime schools. Out of the 84 projects that we funded, Madam Speaker, 73 projects were for rural and maritime areas, so almost all of them was for rural and maritime.

So, this is with respect to the new establishment, as you know, Madam Speaker, last year, our Government made a major step in terms of funding the full salary of ECE teachers. This started in Term Two in 2015 and the current allocation for the child is that we are picking up the tuition fee, \$50 per term, \$150 per year for all children who are five years and above. In addition to that, we do not stop children from attending ECE if they are less than five years old but they are not eligible for the grant, but as soon as they reach five years, we provide the tuition grant to the children.

Madam Speaker, as I alluded to earlier on, we have now also relooked at the qualification of ECE teachers and aligned their salaries. Before it was all kind of messed up. We now have four categories. Category One, the basic training, they have done a short course and they have started teaching. Category Three is where they have got a one year certificate from a recognized training institution. Category Two is where they have got a two-year Diploma and Category Three is where they have got a degree certificate. So for those who have got a Degree in ECE, they are paid \$14 an hour; those who have a diploma, they are paid \$11 an hour; those who have one year certificate, they are paid \$9.30 an hour, and those who have the basic training (not an award programme) are paid \$5 an hour.

Madam Speaker, if you compare this with the salary of a regular teacher in a primary school, you will see it is pretty much comparable. The ECE teacher who teaches the first session only is paid \$12,000 a year and if you double that, it is more than a G-teacher who is paid \$23,000 per annum.

Madam Speaker, in terms of salary alignment, last year with the new grant from the Ministry of Finance, we were able to clean up the salary issue as well and we are directly depositing in their accounts. We are deducting eight percent the employee contribution and depositing it in the social security institution, FNPF, while the school is paying ten percent. So, Madam Speaker, in terms of delays and salaries, all those issues are non-issues now because we are now directly depositing in

their accounts. These are how we are able to clean up this particular section.

Madam Speaker, given the importance of ECE and given the number of ECE Centres we now have, we are gradually moving towards establishing an ECE Section, like we have got the Primary Section - Director Primary; Secondary Section - Director Secondary, we are looking at, in another three years' time a fully-fledged section on its own, Director ECE, Principal Education Officer ECE, Senior Education Officer ECE, et cetera. Madam Speaker that is the plan to ensure that we give importance and recognition to ECE education in Fiji. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite questions from the House. Honourable Nabulivou?

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; how has the Ministry contributed towards professional development of ECE in Fiji?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank my fellow colleague for asking this question.

Madam Speaker, we did two things last year. Firstly, all the professional development programmes, the theory programmes that we had undertaken for primary school teachers, we have encouraged the ECE teachers to attend that as well.

Secondly, for the first time ever last year, we organised a National ECE Conference jointly in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific, Fiji National University, Fulton University College, Marist Champagnat Institute and the Early Childhood Association of Fiji. Over a thousand teachers attended this two-day conference in Lautoka. We compensated the travelling costs of the ECE teachers from the maritime division, those who came from outside Viti Levu, and also provided accommodation in the schools there. Last year, we had over a thousand, this year we are looking after them well. This year again, we will organise a conference which is now an annual event, a conference on ECE education in Fiji, Madam Speaker.

The topics that were covered in the ECE Conference were as follows:

- Professional Practices for ECE teachers in the 21st Century;
- Importance of ECE Education for Children;
- ECE versus Primary Education - the demarcation;
- Learning Environment, Resources and Innovation in ECE Education delivery;
- ECE Education Contemporary in Fiji;
- Healthy Nutrition for Infants;
- Counselling Skills and Managing ECE Children; and
- Managing Environment Change from home to ECE Centre.

This is the first time children are moving from home to ECE Centre so there was a paper done on that, presented to the teachers on how to manage the change whereby children for the first time ever come from home to ECE.

Brain development; we wanted our teachers to understand about the brain development cycle so that they can read the children's minds and deal with them.

Skills and attributes of five-year olds; what are some of the skills and attributes, Madam Speaker, we want the five-year olds to have so that our teachers can deliver onto and those skills and attributes are acquired by those five-year olds?

Lastly, Madam Speaker, we also presented the policies of the Ministry of Education to the ECE teachers so that they are aware of those policies.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, in fact, I want to commend the Government for investing in the ECE sector but my question to the Honourable Minister is about teachers. Are you planning to keep those teachers who are reaching 55 because I know many of them started late in terms of training and I can see from your explanation that there are categories of teachers? Are you planning to keep them beyond 55 to ensure that you have quality teachers?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, at the moment, there is really no scarcity in ECE teachers. Technically at the moment, the employment contract is with the management but we are looking at young dynamic teachers who continue to upgrade their skills and undertake professional development programmes so that they are able to teach at the ECE Centres well and deal with these children with the contemporary skills that they have. It is something that we are looking at, how we deal with a particular issue. So, yes, in the future we are going to look at that in detail.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lt. Col. Netani Rika?

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Honourable Minister, a supplementary question; has the Ministry undertaken any first-aid and OHS training for the ECE teachers, given the important role they play?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member because this is a very critical area. We are handling these five-year old children, there could be anything that could happen in the Centre and we want the teachers at the Centre to have basic OHS skills so that they can handle the children in case there is a particular issue.

Madam Speaker, over the past two years, a total of 1,223 Early Childhood Teachers have been trained in Basic First Aid. Out of the 1,223 teachers, 1,009 teachers were trained during the ECE National Conference.

Madam Speaker, after the Conference, we ran a special session on Basic First Aid because these teachers came from the islands so it would be difficult for them to come again for First Aid Training so we undertook the training there. So, 1,009 teachers were trained on Basic OHS First Aid skills and I will read out the breakdown, Madam Speaker:

District	Teachers
Ra	54
Ba and Tavua	84
Eastern and Maritime Divisions	76
Macuata and Bua	149
Cakaudrove	58
Central Division	365
Nadroga and Navosa	67
Lautoka and Yasawa	156
Total	1,009

In total, Madam Speaker, 1,009 teachers have been trained already. What we are looking at is, this year when we have the National Conference, we will have a back-to-back session on First Aid Skills Training for the new teachers who missed out on the first training at the ECE centre, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the components for the First Aid Training are basically, we exposed them to first-aid, what are some of the techniques; how do you do bandaging, how do you do resuscitation, how do you use crutches, et cetera, so they consist of a whole range of practical exercises that were undertaken by the First Aid trainer.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- My question is on milk and weetbix. Before I ask my question, let me inform the Honourable Minister that in Rukua, they throw away all the milk because they have expired and in some interior schools, they distributed them. My question is....

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, this is specifically about milk and weetbix, the substantive question is not about milk and weetbix, it is about Early Childhood Education; that was the substantive question. That is a completely new question. The Honourable Member, of course, can bring a new question in the next session or next sitting.

HON. MEMBER.- Tomorrow, Thursday,

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a completely different question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister said, the whole point is about returning them. It came from the Honourable Minister.

My question is whether, given what he said, they are included in the weetbix and free milk for schools because they appear to me to need it more than the Class 1. Are they included or not, if not, why not?

HON. SPEAKER.- The question of relevancy has been brought to the House and I do agree totally with the Point of Order that was raised.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Niumataiwalu.

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Madam Speaker, Fiji being a global player, punching above its weight with the Presidency of COP23, Government is committed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Global Goal 4 talks about quality education so my question is, how does the Ministry's Early Childhood Plan fit into the Global Goal for Quality Education?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, with regard to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), at the ECE level, we need to ensure that the children are exposed to contemporary literature. Let me now give you an update on how we are supporting these ECE Centres with respect to resources so that children are exposed to resources, as well as the teachers at the centres do have the resources to enhance their teaching so that these children are not oblivious to contemporary issues that are happening. Madam Speaker, these five-year olds are different than when we were five-year old some five to seven decades ago.

Madam Speaker, we have now begun to establish libraries at ECE Centres. This new initiative is to ensure that both the teachers and students have resources. Last year, a total of 65 ECE Centres had their library corner setup within the ECE room with reading books, educational toys like building blocks, puzzles, stuffed toys and educational posters.

Madam Speaker, we are now working with UNICEF to develop educational cartoons using local examples. As you know, children are attracted to watching cartoons and we do not want them to watch cartoons which has no educational value so we are now in the process of developing educational cartoons. In the first round, we circulated throughout all primary schools in Fiji with an ECE centre attached ECE educational cartoons, but it was developed for the African region. So there was a slight difference in terms of reference to the local example. We are now in the process of developing, we have written the material, the text for the cartoon but we are looking at UNICEF to fund a cartoonist who will help us to develop these cartoons.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, we have provided library books to 165 ECE Centres in 2016 and our target was the maritime and the rural schools.

Madam Speaker, at the moment, we are developing charts. We want every ECE school to have charts, basically three types of charts; one is on objects, one is on numerical and one is on alphabets. We are starting with these three charts. As you know, Madam Speaker, these little kids are quite attracted to visible activities so we want the ECE Centres to have charts on these three areas: numeracy; alphabets; as well as basic key objects that we want them to recognise and help the ECE teacher to teach those.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. In consideration of time, I am now giving the last question to the Honourable Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, no matter how the Honourable Minister is comparing the 149 new school establishments and preparing charts for these students, if the Ministry is not prepared to raise the salary of ECE teachers, are there any plans to upgrade the teacher's salary instead of the monthly pay that they receive which goes directly to their accounts?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the review of salaries is part of the Civil Service Review process and the Job Evaluation Exercise and in that exercise, experts, not us and the unionists, decide what should be the right salary.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. I will now adjourn our sitting for refreshments and we will resume at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.01 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.31 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. On the Order Paper, I had been informed that Honourable Dr. Brij Lal has withdrawn his question, Question No. 18/2017.

(Question No. 18/2017 withdrawn)

I now invite the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu to ask his question.

Progress of the Rainwater Harvesting Programme
(Question No. 19/2017)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport update the House on the progress of the Rainwater Harvesting Programme?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I also thank him because this gives me an opportunity to update this august House on what Government's plans are for this programme.

Madam Speaker, this scheme is provided under the Ministry, through the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development.

Madam Speaker, the officers of the District Commissioners and Roko also identified communities in need of tanks.

As of 26th January, 2017, a total of 3,062 applications had been received from the non-metered customers around the country. There were 348 from the Central Division; 1,339 from the Northern Division; two from the Eastern Division; and 1,373 from the Western Division. In addition, a total of 12 applications were received from metered customers, with eight from the Central Division and four applications were from the Western Division.

Madam Speaker, the Rainwater Harvesting Scheme is expected to benefit about 4,000 homes and the cost of 5,000 litre tank is around \$900. You will recall that a total of \$4.5 million was allocated in the budget for this programme.

Madam Speaker, for the information of this august House, the requirements and screening that need to be met in order to qualify for the assistance is for the household to provide a base for the installation of the tank and to have a proper guttering system, together with the proper down pipe to channel water into the water tank.

Madam Speaker, to-date, a total of 128 households have benefitted from the Rainwater Harvesting Scheme; 2,108 applications have been processed and approved, and ready for distribution and installation.

Madam Speaker, this is the first time that such a programme is in place by the FijiFirst Government. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite questions from the House, if any? Honourable

Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply on this programme. I think this is a very temporary programme because it does not help the people in the area because not every household is provided with a water tank.

The question I want to ask the Honourable Minister is, what about the water reticulation in Tailevu North and the Central Division, from Namau and Viria, when will that come into effect?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the Honourable Member that this is a temporary measure. As I have said earlier, this programme was initiated in the last Budget and this is given to the settlements and villages where they do not have metered water pipe and this is to collect rainwater and in the absence of rainwater, definitely the carting will take place.

Madam Speaker, to say that it is a temporary measure, I do not agree because this programme is not only for this year but this will continue next year as well. So that is the programme that we have in place.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister has mentioned over 2,000 tanks have been approved. My simple question is, when will be the distribution as the recipients will be waiting for the answer?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the process has taken place and around 2,000 applications have been approved and now the distribution will take place.

The distribution authority is WAF and Commissioner's Office, and the target is to supply all these tanks within six months only.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Nanovo?

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the reply given so far regarding this scheme. I understand that Vatulele is one of the areas that also applied for this assistance. What is the progress on that request, Honourable Minister?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, as I have already stated that the applications received is based on the division. I cannot say out of that 1,339 which I have said for the Western Division whether that particular application is there or not, whether it has been approved or not, but let me say this, that whatever application has been received has been approved and processed. However, if the Honourable Member wants further confirmation on that, definitely I can provide that in future.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- As the Honourable Minister had stated 139 applications for rainwater application, but the Honourable Minister will know very well that the last time I made a statement here, I pledged that there were 13 villages that were waiting for the ordinary supplies and it goes back five years, villages including Vusa, and I counted 13 villages. So in terms of priority, which ones come first? Does the rainwater come first or the ordinary reticulation which they have been waiting for, for five years? Will they still have to wait now or which one comes first in terms of priority? Will they address this or the rainwater programmes?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, let me correct Honourable Nawaikula when he said that I had mentioned 158 applications as being received. What I said was that already, 128 households have benefitted from this project.

Now, going back to his question as to which one is priority, there is no priority for this rainwater system. It is assistance that is given to the villages and settlements but as far as the reticulation is concerned, that is the programme that the WAF has got in place and that will take its normal course, based on the budget allocation. But in the meantime, wherever there is assistance required for this rainwater tank, definitely we will move in and give you.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other questions, I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad to ask his written question.

Written Questions

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I apologise, Madam Speaker, I wish to withdraw my question. I just realised that my original question has been substantially butchered up, probably I will raise it in the Business Committee, and so I withdraw the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The question has been withdrawn.

(Written Question withdrawn)

The written responses, although it is not in the Order Paper, the Secretariat has received a notification from the Honourable Minister for Fisheries that he has a written response for tabling. I now call on the Honourable Minister to table his report.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 45(5), I hereby table my written response to Question No. 11/2017 asked by the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you please hand your written response to the Secretary-General?

(Written response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- The question time is now over.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications; the Minister for Education Heritage and Arts; the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Land and Mineral Resources and the Minister for Forests have given Notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40. Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes after which, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his statement.

Update on the Civil Service Reform

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I rise to give a Ministerial Statement to further update Parliament on the Civil Service Reforms being undertaken by the Fijian Government through the Civil Service Reform Management Unit (CSRMU).

Madam Speaker, 2016 was a big year for the reforms, with a lot achieved across the Civil Service. As we are aware, we instigated changes to the systems of recruitment and selection in January, 2016. These changes were also authorized through the Public Service Commission's Guideline to Permanent Secretaries, to ensure enforcement of Open Merit entry to the Service at any level and more robust and reliable methodologies for assessing applicants in making appropriate appointments.

The Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) Guideline seeks to rid the Civil Service of discrimination in appointment practices and as the name suggests, ensures the appointment of the most eligible, qualified and appropriate candidates for positions based on their merit for the job.

The CSRMU conducted an extensive programme of training for selected panel members to sit in the OMRS panels, which saw over 3,000 civil servants and independent representatives trained in the Improved Approach System of Recruitment and Selection. This training is now being handed over to the Core Skills Training Section of the Ministry of Civil Service for them to provide ongoing training for panel members and to ensure the quality and consistency of approaches undertaken by panel members.

The CSRMU, as part of their responsibility for implementation, continues to provide policy advice to Ministries on the OMRS Guideline and its recruitment. The new system was strengthened late last year through the introduction of an appeal mechanism, the Procedure Review Process which adds transparency and accountability to the already robust systems through the ability for applicants who apply for these positions to request a review of the process, if they believe errors have been made in the selection process.

The review is to the Public Service Commission and His Excellency the President, upon recommendation by the Constitutional Offices Commission has confirmed the appointment of Mr. Lawrence McGraw as a full time member of the Public Service Commission. This role has strengthened

the Public Service Commission and enabled them to better manage the Procedure Review Process and the performance of Permanent Secretaries and this is why it has been done through the PSC, and the Permanent Secretaries are ultimately responsible for this.

Mr. McGraw has extensive experience as a Senior Executive with the Australian Public Service. Whilst with the Australian Public Service, he managed and reviewed applications and appeals from within the Public Service. His roles have also included international consulting and provisional advice on reforms and accountability practices in the Civil Service. He also actually helped the Fijian Elections Office prior to 2014 Elections. As with all systems, we are monitoring the implementation and seeking ongoing improvements. The CSRMU will undertake a comprehensive review of the OMRS Guideline, its implementation and results later this year, and will provide a report to the Public Service Commission at that time on any changes that may be needed to strengthen the application of Open Merit.

We know of some collusion amongst civil servants and the public in relation to the introduction of fixed term contracts for the civil servants in 2009. Since then, little changes actually occurred with ministry management continuing to simply roll over the contracts with little assessments of performance or outcomes of the individual.

We are also aware of attempts to measure performance but recent data has confirmed our belief that the system was not robust. It measured some efforts but not outcomes, and we need to be outcome-driven, in fact what the Honourable Minister for Agriculture is always talking about. When you have a ministry that reports less than 30 percent achievement of the Ministry's KPIs but staff performance results are always over 80 percent, you have to conclude that something is not right, there needs to be connectivity.

It is results like this that are being highlighted in the World Bank Institutional Review of individual Ministries. We have now received 13 of these reports and while the example quoted above is the extreme, there is a common theme of mismatch between the reports of individual performance and performance of the Ministries. These reports also give solid suggestions for Ministers and the Permanent Secretaries to implement in order to achieve real change in service delivery to the Fijian people and this is what we are driven by, service delivery. This will require change in the way work is performed with more focus on service delivery and efficiencies in the administration. Ministries are now planning as to how to implement these changes.

The review provides us with research from international jurisdictions where change is already happening and we can learn from the experience in better aligning our service delivery to the Fijian people. This means, Madam Speaker, that Ministries will focus on their core business and some centralised services will enable them to better provide and concentrate on their core business. For example, we want the Ministry of Education to focus on the provision of education, not developing expertise on the construction of buildings and infrastructure, as was suggested by the other side. Our centralised Construction Implementation Unit provides this internal service across the Civil Service, to enable all Ministries to better focus on their core service delivery service to the members of the public.

The Honourable Minister for Health, Madam Speaker, wants health centres, hospitals, equipment and personnel. She is not interested in the actual procurement of these, her core mission is medical services, not construction.

Another example of this alignment is with the Department of Meteorology, which at present is under the Ministry of Infrastructure. It makes sense that this Department moves and is located with the Natural Disaster Management Office, providing them with closer working relationships and better service to the Fijian people as we have been highlighted earlier on that we are getting more climatic events. That obviously makes sense for the Department of Meteorology to have a working and much closer relationship with the Ministry of Natural Disaster Management.

The requirement to advertise positions as contracts expire is another strategy to improve performance and ensure we have the best and most productive workers, providing the Fijian people with the services they need and deserve. It is not a reflection of our current staff, simply a desire to ensure that we have the best people in their right jobs. As we introduce more robust approaches to performance, management and reporting, we anticipate more strategic decision making on which jobs will need to be advertised. We are already seeing the results of the changes in contract management and recruitment and selection.

We have always aimed to become an employer of choice and we need to become an employer of choice, and I would hate to say that previously we were not an employer of choice and we are slowly gaining the ground and we particularly seek to attract our young, bright, intelligent graduates to opportunities in the Civil Service. This is now starting; we are seeing larger and better qualified applicant pool for Civil Service jobs. This will soon flow through to improve services to the members of the public.

Where Open Merit recruitment selection was the first of the foundation for professional service oriented Civil Service, the next stages will have even more impact. We confirm that the Job Evaluation Exercise, which includes a comprehensive review and modernisation of the salary scales and associated terms and conditions of employment, will begin in the next few weeks.

Following a competitive international tender, we are pleased to announce that we are partnering with Strategic Pay in New Zealand and PricewaterhouseCoopers of Fiji to implement this important activity. The project will be managed through the CSR MU, with all the Ministries involved in the ambitious programme to better document their jobs and align their work to the outcomes envisaged for that Ministry. The World Bank Institutional Review Reports are also contributing to this important aspect of improving service delivery.

Building on the research and recommendations from the two Reports from the World Bank last year, Cabinet has approved that civil servants' salaries must be benchmarked to at least 75 percent of the private sector. We have further confirmed that there will be no job losses through the Job Evaluation Exercise.

All civil servants, Madam Speaker, can expect some improvement in their current remuneration package, acknowledging that this is a very different approach to the old way of percentage increases across the board. We believe that benchmarking or remuneration to the private sector will better enable the Civil Service to compete with the private sector for talent and more fairly remunerated staff for the jobs they do.

We have already started, Madam Speaker, as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Health,

with pay rise of up to 80 percent for doctors and they are paying for all postgraduates studies at FNU (FSM School) now for all doctors in Fiji who are employed by Government. Any postgraduate study that they undertake at FNU is 100 percent paid for by the Government.

We do also recognise that some of our positions are not represented in the private sector and, therefore, the benchmark data for these positions would not be a fair comparison for salary purposes. In particular, here we are referring to teachers and nurses, where the bulk of that workforce is in the public sector.

For these professions, we have commissioned an additional report to identify salary relationships with other professions in neighbouring countries. By this, we are not examining how much teachers and nurses are paid for by those neighbours, but what professionals are paid similarly to them, so that we can also use that benchmark data to set fair wages for these essential staff. We expect to have a draft of this report in the next two weeks which is well in time for the planned reviewed of salary scale for these professions during quarter two.

The remuneration review also provides opportunities to recognise the differences between jobs within professions or within the same jobs. For example, in the nursing profession, Madam Speaker, there are differences in skills and risks of different jobs. In Fiji, we are always beholden to titles.

What we want to demonstrate is this; this is best illustrated by the difference between a nurse who is highly trained and skilled supporting the cardiac unit in heart surgeries or angioplasty, et cetera, and those who are trained as skilled nurses, who may be working in an outpatients department, but who are not exposed to the same level of risk as the nurse who is working in the cardiac department. These two nurses, at present, have the same title and receive the same pay, but clearly this should not be the case.

The new system will recognise those different career paths and to aim to remunerate for those specialisations accordingly. We have to recognise people who have gone an extra mile to get that extra training and for whom we depend on during very high risk surgeries or operations or procedures as opposed to those who are not. These examples highlight how the reforms will contribute to improving the morale of our civil servants and through that, the service delivery to the Fijian people which has always been the core focus and reason for the reforms.

It will also encourage our civil servants to continuously upgrade their professional skills sets and get into specialised areas. A full remuneration review requires that we examine not only the salary scales, but also the allowances and other benefits received by civil servants.

We have commenced a progressive review of the General Orders, to modernise them and develop an overall approach to remuneration, which will ensure that civil servants are fairly compensated, do not lose an overall benefit to what they receive now but wherever possible, the administration of costs of paying salaries and allowances are minimised also at the same time.

The CSRMU have been working to plan the activities to enable this to occur since late last year. Apart from the tender for international recognised methodology to access job levels as mentioned earlier, another important element is a Job Evaluation Remuneration Setting Guidelines. But before I get into

that, Madam Speaker, we already have a quarter by quarter plan as to which skill sets or profession within the Civil Service will get assessed first.

For this quarter, the Support Services, Government Wage Earners, Procurement and Supplies, Information Research, Information Statistical, Department of Audit, Accounting, and Immigration will be reviewed in the first quarter.

The next quarter will be Dental, Physiotherapy, Nutrition, Dietician, Paramedics, Para-dental, Pharmacists, Nursing, Education, of course involving teachers and Social Workers.

The third quarter will be Environmental Survey, Town Planners, Information Technology, Technical in general, Engineers support, Scientific and Technical support, Engineers Professional, Scientific and Research Veterinary, Primary Resources, Medical, Legal and Foreign Affairs.

All of these, Madam Speaker, should be completed by August this year.

Madam Speaker, as highlighted, the Job Evaluation Remuneration Setting Guideline which was recently approved and released by the Public Service Commission, is now being implemented. This Guideline confirms our commitment to position based-pay and introduction of internationally recognised tenets for determining the pay relativities between jobs. It also includes the planned timetable of activities to ensure that we meet our targets, to have the completed review of the salary scales within this financial year.

Madam Speaker, at this point, we would like to introduce a note of caution. Although we plan to review the salary scales, movement of staff into the new scales requires work and efforts from the Ministries. This involves the very staff who will want to move on to the amended salary scales. For this to occur, jobs need to be accurately documented and evaluated, to ensure they are allocated to the right level on the new scales. This can only occur as quickly as staff and their managers complete the documentation, and have it verified and confirmed by Executive Management.

We see this as a huge opportunity to revisit some roles, amend them to take account of the Ministry's reviewed reports and to ensure that work is varied, multi-skilled and outcomes-focussed. A full training programme is being prepared and it will begin to roll out next week to ensure this work is completed in a timely manner.

Madam Speaker, this also means that the individual Ministries need to strengthen their Human Resources (HR) Department. As it is seen traditionally, the HR Department generally do not include people who are actually trained in Human Resources Management, they simply are people who have been working as clerks, who simply come up the ladder and carry out the jobs in the HR Department. We need specialised people to be able to appreciate the modern day way of running an employer service-orientated infrastructure.

The Job Evaluation Remuneration Setting Guideline also provides a comprehensive policy, based to ensure that while Permanent Secretaries exercise their authority to determine the terms and conditions of employment, this is done consistently across the Civil Service. We do not want a situation, for example, as happened in Australia a few years ago, where the Permanent Secretaries were actually given

the envelope of money and you have some ministries paying very high salaries and others were not paying so we need some level of consistency, this is what we will be doing.

This policy also ensures that these new positions are created or positions changed, we can ensure they remain fairly graded and remunerated. We need to strengthen the individual HR departments, as we have said earlier on in their respective ministries.

Whilst we are confident we will get the relativities and consistency right at the time of the Salary Scale Review, as time goes by and changes in job occurs, we want to ensure that the consistency across Ministries stays in place. We do not want to see employees doing substantially the same work in different Ministries but being paid differently, as highlighted earlier on.

To ensure that salaries remain fair and consistent, the Guideline introduces the Job Evaluation Leadership Team consisting of the Director of CSRMU and at least two Permanent Secretaries, who will moderate a percentage of the job evaluated on an ongoing basis in the Ministries. This ensures that we will have the capacity going forward, to maintain a fair system for determine job levels and remuneration.

We have already provided access for civil servants to the Arbitration Court as a mechanism for addressing collective bargaining disputes. The Court has been appointed by the Honourable Chief Justice and is an independent tripartite body. The Public Service Discipline Tribunal has also been appointed by the Honourable Chief Justice and is already hearing disciplinary cases from within the Civil Service.

In consultation with the Public Service Disciplinary Tribunal, we have established another important foundation in modernising the Civil Service through the introduction or significant changes to the approaches to discipline within the Civil Service.

Our aim, Madam Speaker, is to establish a highly professional set of employees with clear objectives and targets, which will minimise the need for disciplinary action. But we recognise, that we must have a system for dealing with any employees, who do not uphold the stated values of the Civil Service or unable to perform to the standard expected. Again, building on through thorough research, the Public Service Commission has recently approved and released the Discipline Guideline to Permanent Secretaries.

Madam Speaker, the Discipline Guideline introduces the modern management practices to the field of discipline, grounded in the principles of natural justice while providing a system that should be faster and fairer than our practices of the past. We confirm that discipline is not meant to punish, but is instead intended to ensure that the employees who cannot, uphold our values and the Code of Conduct are dealt with fairly and accountably, while providing a safe and attractive working environment for employees who do want to uphold our values.

This Guideline was developed in consultation with the Public Service Discipline Tribunal and confirmed the specific roles of the Permanent Secretary and the Tribunal in ensuring that fair, disciplined practices with the staff.

Now, that we have these additional guidelines in place, we are further reviewing the Civil Service

Act and Regulations to ensure that they align to the changes being made. This will ensure there is no inconsistency in our legal framework covering the Civil Service.

This Bill is the review of the Civil Service Act which was passed by Parliament in February last year, and subsequent amendments to the Regulations at the end of last year to align them to the Constitution.

The pace of change is increasing. Last year, we implemented one Guideline and in the first half of this year, the two Guidelines already mentioned - the Job Evaluation Remuneration Setting Guideline and Discipline Guideline will begin the implementation.

In the second half of this year, we will introduce the two final planned Guidelines for:

1. Performance Management; and
2. Training and Staff Development.

These final two planned Guidelines will complete the overall focus of providing guidance to Permanent Secretaries on how they should manage their constitutional authority and maintain consistency across the Civil Service.

We recognise how important these steps will be for all civil servants and for the service to the public. We are committed to ensuring modern attractive terms and conditions of employment.

As part of our stakeholder engagement, we have also reached out to the respective units, in fact, we have been meeting up with the Confederation of Public Sector Unions and already had about three meetings, and recognising at the same time that not all civil servants are members of a trade union. We have also consulted directly with our employees.

We have had some very useful and productive discussions with all of our stakeholders as we developed our policy and guidelines. We will continue to meet with our stakeholders to seek their views and comments, both on the practical issues with regard to the implementation of the Guidelines and how these can be addressed, but also new initiatives that are still being developed. We welcome any feedback on the implementation, including advice on practices which do not align to the principles of the Guidelines. We will certainly continue to partner with all stakeholders to ensure the full implementation of our modernisation programme.

We note, however, Madam Speaker, that some of our stakeholders are focussed on the past and are not fully aware of how beneficial this modernisation programmes have been to both, organisations and employees alike. One can only take the leaf out of many other jurisdictions, including places like Singapore, when they went through a similar exercise.

It is timely to acknowledge the assistance from our key development partners in this ambitious Programmes or Reforms. Following international best practices, it is our Government which has the vision of where we are headed and our development partners who are supporting us to achieve this vision

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- the World Bank through the Institutional Review Ministries and their research supporting guidelines which are the backbone of the reforms; and

- the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, who have provided technical assistance to support the implementation of the Guidelines.

The confirmation of modern management practices and support in implementing our plans is greatly appreciated.

The Civil Service Reform Management Unit will soon embark on an extensive communication and training programme to ensure that all civil servants understand how the changes will affect their terms and conditions of employment. The Communication Strategy aims to reach out to all civil servants, and will be accompanied by relevant materials for the public so that they too understand the extent of the changes and what they can expect from the civil servants. To ensure that the Civil Service Reforms are appropriately laid, managed and achieving the progress we have planned, we advertised for a replacement Director to lead the Unit.

You may recall that our previous Director, Ms. Makereta Konrote, is also the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Economy, was appointed as Permanent Secretary but she is doubled up as a Director. We are now pleased to announce the appointment of Ms. Jane Karan, as the Director, following an international local recruitment exercise. Ms. Karan is extensively experienced in the Civil Service Reforms in many countries around the world, including experience here in Fiji and we welcome her expertise to the programme.

Madam Speaker, we look forward to updating you on the progress of these Reforms as implementation proceeds, in particular once we have all the new increments to salaries and conditions of the civil servants which should be completed by August this year.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for that statement on the Civil Service Reform. To me, it sounds like a dream but in my response, I would like to bring us back to reality.

Madam Speaker, an organisation or a ministry or department can have all the resources. They can have the money, machines or equipment but if they do not have the right kind of people, nothing is going to eventuate to the dreamer's expectation.

Madam Speaker, let me highlight the salary of the civil servants. There was a five percent pay cut, I believe, in 2007. Also, on the eve of the Election, I believe in 2014, there was a pay rise, but the pay rise did not recover the five percent pay cut and I believe the gap is still there to be recovered or to be paid to the civil servants.

Madam Speaker, also in terms of the salary, I believe in 2013 or 2014 period there was this massive increase in the Permanent Secretaries' salaries. With that increase, there was no announcement by the Public Service Commission or the Public Service to the general public so that we know about the

salary increase.

The salary increase increased the Permanent Secretaries' salary from about \$65,000, some went up to \$165,000 and some even went up to the \$200,000 mark. When that happened, those below the Permanent Secretary did not receive any pay increase. So, Madam Speaker, what I am trying to highlight here is the pay discrimination or the pay gap.

There is no pay relativity, no market relativity and if that is the case with the Deputy Secretaries and below, how can you make your employees happy if they can see that their boss has that kind of salary and everyone else down the line do not have and these are very people who do the work? They are the legs, the hands, the eyes, the engine room of the Ministry and with that kind of situation in place, Madam Speaker, the people will be feeling very unhappy. An unhappy worker is an unproductive worker.

Madam Speaker, may also I highlight on the Retention Policy. What kind of Retention Policy does the Civil Service have to be able to retain the right kind of staff that the Civil Service needs? In the recent past there has been massive resignation as they say, but it is actually termination of people who have been terminated without renewal of contract.

Right now, Madam Speaker, the Civil Servants are feeling very vulnerable, very threatened because they work in an environment of fear. They are feeling insecure because of their term of three years contract, not really knowing whether it will be renewed or not and it is unfair on them, Madam Speaker, because these officers are not fully provided with the kind of resources they need. For example, someone in the private sector will get telephone, a car, a laptop or a computer but this does not happen in the Civil Service, they will have to share.

Madam Speaker, let me highlight to the Honourable Minister, I went for an extraction of a birth certificate and their computer broke down. We had to sit there for 15 minutes without being served.

Madam Speaker, may I also read to you the Constitution on the responsibilities of the Permanent Secretary and it borders on the breach of the separation of powers and I will read part of Section 127(7):

“...remove and institute disciplinary action against all staff of the Ministry, with the agreement of the Minister responsible for the Ministry.”

This means, Madam Speaker, that at the end of the day, the Permanent Secretary will have to listen to the Minister and when that happens, there is no separation of powers.

That is constitutional and that is political interference and that is why, Madam Speaker, the Civil Servants will always feel vulnerable and they will always feel threatened because the environment that they are working in is not fair and it is threatening their job security and their career development.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of the NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B. C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I have no quarrel with the intentions and the aims of reviewing the Civil Service, but I have several questions to the Honourable Minister. When you talk about Open Merit System, when you talk about the principles of Human Resource Management in the private sector, you can apply the Open Merit System. When you talk about principles of Human Resource Management in the private sector, you can pick up some principles from the private sector and apply it in the public sector.

However, the Government is not a private company. Government runs on an independent, transparent, secure, motivated Civil Service and I think part of the problem with this Government and I sympathise with them, is that the Civil Service because they themselves have created a situation over the last several years where the civil servants do not feel secure, they do not feel comfortable, and they are not sure about their future.

In theory, what the Honourable Minister said, Madam Speaker, sounds very good and I hope that he is successful. But in practical terms, it is always very difficult in an Open Merit System. It depends on the context, it depends on the committees, it depends on how transparent the system is and how accountable it is.

Madam Speaker, Open Merit System means that you can go outside of the organisation. Closed Merit System which you can have in the Civil Service is, you pick up the best from within the Civil Service for promotions which are based on qualifications, experience and the Civil Service requires experience. So I am not sure whether the Open Merit System in the Public Service is what is going to work in the long run.

What I would suggest, Madam Speaker, is for the Honourable Minister to consider, I think, it is the entry level that is always a problem in the Civil Service. If you correct the entry level, in other words, you hire the best people and to do that, you have to have a system where you have very very thorough tests, requirements for anyone wanting to enter the Civil Service to make an entry. Once you have highly qualified, motivated people entering the Civil Service at the entry level, you will have a pool of people within the system with the appropriate qualifications and experience in the long run with the appropriate training that you can practice, what I call Close Merit within the Civil Service, and this is the problem.

I go back to what Honourable Radrodro said and here, the Honourable Prime Minister must listen to this carefully. I think what the Honourable Attorney-General said may conflict with the Constitution because the Constitution says, "...the Permanent Secretary, with the agreement of the Minister..." Now, if you go by the Constitution, even the Prime Minister will not be able to convince the Minister or Permanent Secretary, if they do not want to listen to him about a particular recruitment and sacking according to this Constitution.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Read the procedure before.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not about the procedure, the Constitution is supreme. This is your Constitution.

I think we need some serious discussions with respect to what is in the Constitution.

The other question I want to ask the Honourable Attorney-General is, the Civil Service must reflect the composition and the nature of the society. When you apply merit, all probability is that the people who would be hired will reflect the composition and the nature of the society because if you are talking about

merit, the merit will reflect that. My question to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General is, the system that they want to identify, that is the fact, you cannot deny that.

When you talk about Open Merit, you have to ensure that the system brings that Open Merit. As I said, even the Open Merit concept as proposed to be applied in the Civil Service is unlikely to work, and that is the warning I want to give to the Government. Re-look at this, do not go by what the World Bank says or some other practice! Look at what will work here.

Madam Speaker, I think we need to look at two issues; we need to look at the process of the Constitution and we need to look at the definition of the Open Merit System as opposed to the Closed Merit System.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and National Archives of Fiji to deliver his statement.

Bridging the Accessibility to Education Gap

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Members of Parliament; I want to thank you for the opportunity to give an update on the topic, 'Bridging the Accessibility to Education Gap'.

Madam Speaker, throughout the world, Governments are now converging on the notion that an effective education system can directly contribute to poverty and hardship reduction, as well as contribute to long-term economic growth and stability. Acquisition of knowledge and skills improves individuals' earning potential and ability to invest wisely in their future and those of their families. Educating women and girls is particularly transformative, raises their earnings potential, allows them to have a say in their household affairs and be treated with dignity and respect.

Madam Speaker, a UNESCO 2013/2014 Report on Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring reveals that since year 2000, impressive gains have been made globally in access to schooling, particularly for primary schools. Global movement in education noted the mobilisation in education in the following key areas:

1. Investment in Early Childhood Education and accessibility to primary and secondary education at the global level.
2. Investment in quality education at all levels at the global level.
3. Prioritise equity in education with particular emphasis on children from poor households and a focus on females.
4. Aligning education skills with labour market needs through investing in relevant high quality secondary and post-secondary education.

Madam Speaker, this is the global perspective and those are the four areas globally, education is now being focussed. Now, I will look at where we picture in the global 'education for all' agenda.

Madam Speaker, when the Bainimarama-led Government took over the reins of our beloved nation, one of the priority areas it decided to focus on was education. The Bainimarama-led Government noted that to make substantial strides towards economic prosperity, progress, development and most importantly for peace and stability in our beloved island nation, education had to be made accessible to all Fijians. Only this will allow sustained growth and development of the country in which everyone will be engaged.

Madam Speaker, the key aspect of this growth model is to ensure that everyone is engaged. If this happens, then when the economy grows and if everyone is engaged in the growth process, the growing economy will generate benefit. Everyone who are engaged in the growth process will also benefit, and that is what education does, to allow everyone to be engaged in the education process.

Madam Speaker, our Government first had to identify what was the reason for our children in particular, from the interior and maritime division, not to continue with their primary and secondary education. In this journey to examine and see first-hand the issues, problems and challenges faced by ordinary Fijians, our Honourable Prime Minister travelled widely across the country, particularly to areas which are not comfortable to past 'career politicians'; places which are accessible by gravel road only or where there is no road but tracks and settlements and villages accessible by boat or horseback only. Madam Speaker, these are settlements and villages in deep, remote interior and maritime zones. In this visit, the Honourable Prime Minister noted the massive disparity with respect to provision of basic amenities such as, housing, public utilities like water and electricity, health and education.

Within education, our Honourable Prime Minister noted that the deeply-rooted principles, many of which were based on racial, preferential, unfair and unjust ethics were actually degrading the Fijian education system and making basic education inaccessible to ordinary Fijians. This inaccessibility to education by the rank and file has been a causal factor for the glaring disparity amongst Fijian households with respect to income, standard of living, welfare and health.

Madam Speaker, our Honourable Prime Minister realised that the entire system needed a major reform, keeping in mind the ordinary Fijians who, by being out of sight were out of mind, while drafting policies that were being undertaken by the previous Governments. Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that because they were out of sight, they are in the interior and rural remote areas, they were not in mind when policies were being drafted by previous Governments. Thus, Madam Speaker, the process of Education Reform began in the late 2013.

Madam Speaker, we are making quality education accessible to every Fijian, no matter where they are located in Fiji. We are strongly focussing our objective that no longer should our fellow countrymen from the islands, rural areas and remote locations be deprived of accessing quality education. No longer should parents and children endure hardships and difficulties to gain formal qualifications. No longer will families have to take loan, sell their assets or miss meals to send their children to school.

Madam Speaker, we have taken the burden off their shoulders. We have intervened and ensured that a child, right from Early Childhood Education to Tertiary Education is fully supported with all means and resources. Madam Speaker, accessibility to education connects with cost of education including fees, cost of textbooks and transport costs, with provision of resources and infrastructure, with provision of quality educators and a basis for provision of formal as well as technical education.

Madam Speaker, as a result of the Free Education Scheme, there has been significant increase in a number of students attending primary and secondary schools from 2014. In 2013, we had 212,668 students in the pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools in Fiji. However, in 2014 this figure increased to 222,145, an additional enrolment of 9,477 students. So within a period of one year, with the free education, we saw an additional of 9,477 students enter our school system.

Madam Speaker, from 2013 to 2016 we saw 14,000 more students enrolled in our school system. That demonstrates how these children were dropping out from the education system because the system itself was inaccessible to the ordinary Fijians in the interior and rural areas.

Madam Speaker, this required a massive increase in the Education Grant given to the Education Sector for only primary and secondary schools from the meagre \$19.1 million in 2013 to \$67.8 million last year. So we can see what it required, the kind of commitment - the financial commitment it required from Government to ensure that these children who were not able to access schools are now able to come into our education system.

Madam Speaker, under the Free Education Grant, schools are permitted to provide the various Departments with the best equipment and resources. All Labs, Libraries and resources must be updated and students should have access to the best, Madam Speaker. The grants are specifically targetted at improving the overall school teaching and learning environment. So, Madam Speaker, the Free Education Grant we are giving is to enhance the learning environment which includes, resources for teachers, as well as resources for students and the infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, you may still see some differences with respect to the quality of infrastructure of the schools in the interior *vis-a-vis* schools in the urban areas now. This is because of the years of neglect by previous Governments which we now have to address. We are playing a 'catch up' game, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in line with the Ministry's Pillar 3 which focuses on the improvement of infrastructure in our schools, our Ministry is fully committed to ensure that it achieves the target of quality infrastructural development in all our schools. The focus area for development works in schools has been the upgrading of libraries, provision of ablution blocks, science labs, new classrooms, boarding facilities, construction and renovation of teachers' quarters, ECE Centres development, construction of the dining hall, and repair and maintenance of existing structures.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, we provided financial assistance over and above the Free Education Grant to 276 schools for infrastructural development amounting to \$6.9 million. Out of those 276 projects, there were only 37 urban/peri-urban schools, while 151 was for interior schools and 88 schools was in maritime zones. So you can see, Madam Speaker, our concentration is on those schools that were being neglected over the past three to four decades, and who were outside the urban area and, therefore, not having any support from the corporate or business sector in terms of donations.

Madam Speaker, similarly in 2016 we assisted 278 schools. In 2015, we assisted 276 schools and last year we assisted 278 schools, amounting to \$6.1 million. So 2015, 276 schools - \$6.9 million; in 2016, 278 schools - \$6.1 million.

Madam Speaker, let me give you a brief background on where these schools are located area-wise. In Cakaudrove we provided \$1.38 million over the two years - interior, isolated and mostly engaged in subsistence farming.

In Macuata/Bua - \$1.7 million; Lautoka/Nadi/Yasawa and the interior and maritime Yasawas - \$1.29 million; Nadroga/Navosa - \$0.9 million; Ra - \$0.5 million; Ba/Tavua - \$0.5 million; Eastern Division - \$2.2 million and the interior of Suva, the Nausori corridor, Rewa and the interior of Tailevu and Naitasiri - \$4.2 million. So this is the level of assistance we gave, but we are still lagging behind. It will take time because the years of neglect the schools have been subjected to and the kind of treatment given to those schools owned by these poor communities out in the interior and in the maritime areas, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, for long, our parents struggled to provide bus fares to children travelling to school. Inability to find cash daily, resulted in students missing some days or dropping out from school. Madam Speaker, if you are living in the interior rural area, finding cash every morning to send your three or four children to school is not an easy task. In the rural interior area, you do not necessarily have cash at home so what would happen, parents get their children either to rotate - who will go today, who will go the next day, et cetera, or the children will entirely drop out, Madam Speaker. In this Government, this struggle is a thing of the past. Our children no longer have to stay home because they cannot afford to pay their bus fare.

Madam Speaker, under the Free Transport Scheme, we have given out bus fare vouchers to needy students right from Year 1 to Year 13, which is now being extended Technical College students as well in the 13 Campuses. In 2015, we injected \$19 million, Madam Speaker, while in 2016, we increased the budget to \$20 million because of the additional Technical College students coming into the Scheme.

Madam Speaker, this shows that the number of the students/recipients is increasing. In 2013, we had 77,626 students benefiting. In 2016, this number increased to 88,926 students. So you can see, Madam Speaker, substantially about 9,000 more students are getting bus fare subsidy just over the three year period.

Madam Speaker, we also made some changes to the Bus Fare Transport Scheme. Before only 80 cents was provided and parents had to pay the balance. Now, we are picking up whether you need one voucher, two or three vouchers, as long as you need the bus fare support to go from your home to the nearest school and come back, we provide the full bus fare coupons.

Madam Speaker, in the maritime zone and in some rural areas, students and teachers have to cross rivers and would travel from one island to the other to reach their school. We have looked into that and have provided boat and engine to ease their transport woes, Madam Speaker.

In 2015, a total of 14 schools were assisted with a boat and engine and in 2016, 22 schools have been provided with a boat and engine. Madam Speaker, I think it is important for me to list down these schools and the islands or areas which received this assistance because it matters a lot to these communities. I will provide the tabulated information as follows:

Area/Island	Total No. of Boats per area/island in 2015 & 2016	Names of Schools
Kadavu	6	Kadavu Provincial Secondary School
		Nasegai District School
		Yawe District School
		Vacalea District School
		Galoa Village School
		Vabea District School
Lau	9	Maloku District School
		Tuvuca Village School
		Cikobia District School
		Ratu Mocevakaca Memorial School
		Nayau District School
		Davetalevu Primary School
		Kabara District School
		Cicia High School
		Yasana-i-Ra District School
Bua	2	Lekutu District School
		Naivaka District School
Cakaudrove	4	Vatuvula District School
		Tawake District School
		Wainika District School
		Kocoma Village School
Lomaiviti	3	Sawaieke District School
		Lamiti/Malawai Primary School
		Batiki District School
Yasawa	4	Gaunavou Primary School
		Bouwaqa Village School
		Ratu Namasi Memorial School
		Naviti District School
Beqa	2	Uluinakorovatu Primary School
		Rukua/Raviravi Primary School
Malake Island	1	Malake Village School
Labasa	3	Cikobia Primary School
		Nadogo Central College
		Duavata Secondary School
Nadroga	1	Vatulele Primary School
Rewa	1	Vutia District School

Madam Speaker, this year more schools will be assisted, it is in the tender process.

Madam Speaker, the question is, did these schools not need it before? Yes, they did, they needed it. Why were they not assisted? Because previous Governments made policies as if they did not exist.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- It is my turn now.

As if they did not matter, Madam Speaker. Our Government has gone beyond the standard template-based policy making.

Madam Speaker, in the past, tertiary education had remained a dream for many children of poor households in Fiji. Those parents who had some assets which they could liquidate in a short period of time, they chose to do so and part with it so that they could educate their children. Some with social security savings would withdraw that, putting their own old age security at risk, but a large proportion in the rural areas, originating from subsistence or semi-subsistence economy neither had any assets to liquidate nor had any social security savings to withdraw, Madam Speaker. Their children found it difficult to make it to the small sum allocated to fund their tertiary studies by the previous Governments. Their dream remained a dream, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, those days are gone now. Our Government introduced the Toppers and Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS) so that every child in this country can finance their studies without having to worry about how their parents, or where their parents will find the finance.

Madam Speaker, the Toppers Scheme works on merit. From 2014 to the end 2016, we had a total of 1,494 students under the Toppers Scheme. In 2014, we had 345 students who benefited from the Scheme; 2015, 489 and 2016 (last year), 615 students. This year, we will have close to another 630 students studying under the Scheme. This Scheme is not ethnically based as was in the past. This scholarship is accessible to everyone on merit.

Past Governments used the ethnic card for political expediency, Madam Speaker. Under the Bainimarama-led Government, all Fijians regardless of ethnic background can work hard to attain this scholarship.

Our loans scheme has now given a new hope for a better future for thousands of households who had lost hope. In 2014, we gave out loans to 4,286 students while in 2015, the number grew to 8,664. Last year, we gave loans to 12,436 students, Madam Speaker. Furthermore, in 2015, we gave the opportunity to Technical College students in Fiji to access loans to which 1,086 students benefitted while in 2016, the number grew to 2,210.

Madam Speaker, we note that teachers were reluctant to get posted to rural areas for several reasons. While we are improving school infrastructure and also allocating funds to provide quality accommodation, we also decided to raise their location allowance to compensate for the cost associated with this. Last year, we doubled the rural location allowance so that we could attract teachers to go and teach in the rural areas.

Madam Speaker, in our days, most interior schools operated without any power source, but this is not possible now due to demands of the current era. There are a number of support equipment that requires power source to run it. Furthermore, IT laboratories need to be powered, but not all rural schools have access to grid power. For those schools, we have provided a generator each. In 2015 and 2016, we provided 130

generators to schools which did not have access to electricity by the grid or they were off grid. Now, schools do not have issues relating to printing, photocopying or provision of IT education, Madam Speaker.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, we assisted 254 schools with the provision of water tanks - 145 in 2015 and 109 in 2016, so that the schools are able to have safe drinking water and can store water.

Madam Speaker, we are on course to have infrastructure between interior and urban schools, given the gap and given the neglect, it will take time but in the right path and the right course.

Madam Speaker, we are now streamlining a number of other areas. Special Schools, inclusive education, we have invested heavily to ensure that no child is excluded from the education process.

Thank you, Madam Speaker,

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I seek leave of the House to hear the two responses before we break for lunch. Do I have any opposition?

There being no opposition, I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or her designate for his or her response.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Yesterday, I saw him sitting very quietly because thunder has been taken away from him from the Honourable Attorney-General, but now I am glad that he has come up with some ideas about education and outlining the gap.

From the outset, Honourable Speaker, I would like to urge the Honourable Minister to call for an Education Summit in order to discuss all these issues that he has raised in this House, so that people of this country will take ownership of the system. At least their input will also be included in the curriculum of the Ministry of Education.

The Honourable Minister spoke about TELS and I would just like to inform the House that TELS is only for those who can afford it in terms of the education that they have achieved because students who have been awarded TELS come from very good backgrounds and they can afford this. But in terms of the gap that the Honourable Minister has alluded to, it is not helping the *iTaukei* students of this country, especially for students living in remote and rural areas.

Students' performance in rural remote schools cannot be easily compared with those in urban centres because in urban schools, we take into consideration, Madam Speaker, the remoteness and the scarce resources that they have in order to support their education, for example, no electricity. As a result, they will end up with two options; one is, they will have to apply for TELS, ask for a loan to go and pursue further studies and these students come from very poor families and have to struggle again in fully repaying the amount loaned when they have completed their studies.

A parent told me that his daughter who has enrolled at USP will have to repay \$21,000 when she completes her education degree at the University. We need free tuition, Madam Speaker, we do not need TELS.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Hear, hear. Free tuition.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, 2017 school year has already began and school children are still learning in tents. How will one expect quality education for our children in order to bridge the education gap, as outlined by the Honourable Minister when the Government is not providing the best training environment, especially in this situation where the Government is not very concerned and attentive to students and teachers who have been suffering for the last 11 months.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Students are told to go home when it rains as it gets muddy, especially those who attend school in tents.

The Ministry of Education used to focus on the rehabilitation programme as the first priority instead of coming up with further developments in schools, such as opening new schools and new initiatives like free milk and weetbix, tablets, et cetera. There is a need to monitor the effects of these freebies and its impact on student's examination achievements. How are we in terms of quality passes?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- No good.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- In Lomary, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has dropped off some milk and they are taking up space in the school, for the neighbouring schools are not taking up their milk and dropping off into their own schools. So, in order for the education gap to be bridged, Madam Speaker, teachers, who are the education facilitators deserve better conditions and incentives like pay rise and increase in rural allowance. I am glad that the Honourable Minister has said that for those teachers who serve in rural schools. When the teachers are happy, they will also do their work better.

And ECE teachers, Madam Speaker, they need an upgrade in their pay as we have heard in this august House this morning that the current monthly pay they receive is not sufficient, given the high cost of living that we experience.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, teachers must be given the opportunity to be trained to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities, especially for schools with disability needs. Their teachers need to be in service in order to be able to produce the result that they should get in schools that they teach in. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am actually amazed at the exaggerated sense of credit that the Honourable Minister and this Government want to take with respect to access to education in this country.

You know, Madam Speaker, that we have had a very significant success rate in terms of access to education in this country over the last several years. The Honourable Minister also seems to be confused. When he talks about previous governments and he talks about reforms from 2013, he does

not realise that from 2006 right up to 2014, there was another Bainimarama-led Government (not the elected one) and many of the reforms that the then Minister for Education undertook during that period, almost 50 percent of them have been reversed by the present Minister for Education, Madam Speaker.

What we have been saying and it seems to me, that the Honourable Minister is sounding like an old record now. He comes here with his Ministerial Statements, talks about what they have done in terms of schools and the provision of facilities, that is fine. I mean, we appreciate that, that is important. The increase in grants have helped the schools to improve their infrastructure and so forth.

But I think he is not addressing the fundamental question that we have asked many times in this House and that is quality. Access and quality go together. There was no review, no serious study by experts to look at what those reforms led to, what were their outcomes and how far these new reforms have produced outcomes that align with quality. I mean, there are bits here and there which suggest that there is no basis for the Honourable Minister to claim that all these reforms are produced in quality outcomes, quality students. And what you see, Madam Speaker, some of that is now translating into tertiary institutions, students with marks are finding all sorts of pathways to get into the university, and we have serious issues with respect to those graduates and the quality of those graduates.

The other point that I want to emphasize and I have said this to the Honourable Minister many times is, when you talk about quality, if you want to produce quality education and quality students in this country, you got to look at the performance of the teachers as well. I think the teachers in this country are totally disappointed, demoralised and unhappy about the way in which some of the reforms have been undertaken and how they have been dealt with. I mean, you do not expect first-year teachers with \$12,000 salary, which is below the poverty line salary....

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You started with that \$12,000 salary, after we raised that issue and reminded him that it was below poverty line salary, he increased it.

This is the kind of reform that I am talking about that has been instituted by this Government and the Ministry by not seriously taking into account what is going on.

I want the Government to consider this, unless they appoint an independent expert group to look at what has happened over the last few years, how these reforms have been implemented in the areas of curriculum, in the areas of training of teachers, hiring and firing of teachers...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Enough!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I have one more minute.

... we will not be sure what these reforms are doing, Madam Speaker. I think what this Government has done is put the education system on a path which appears to be very, very dangerous in terms of the kind of outcome that we are going to produce in the end and quality is one thing that the Honourable Minister for Education and this Government does not understand in education.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members.

At this point we will adjourn proceedings for lunch. I invite all Honourable Members to join me in the Big Committee Room for the launch of the *Parliament of Fiji Handbook*.

Immediately after the launch, the Members of the Business Committee are requested to meet in the Small Committee Room. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.46 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume from where we left off. I now call on the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Land and Mineral Resources to deliver his statement.

Ministry of Industry, Trade & Tourism's Initiatives to Better the Economy

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, I thank you for allowing me to take the floor to deliver my Ministerial Statement on the initiatives undertaken by my Ministry to better the economy and the lives of Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, in my last address to this august House, I reiterated the Government's commitment towards restoring the livelihoods of those affected by *TC Winston*. My Ministry, Madam Speaker, has completed the validation process of all recipients of the Micro Small Business Grant (MSBG), who sustained damages to their businesses.

Madam Speaker, this was a major undertaking by the Ministry and the exercise required resources in terms of finance, manpower and with teams deployed to Nabouwalu, Savusavu, Taveuni, Ovalau, Tailevu North, Rakiraki, Tavua, Vatukoula, Ba, Lautoka and Yasawa.

Madam Speaker, the validation process has confirmed that 2,508 Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) will be assisted under that MSBG rehabilitation programme with the total amount of \$2.2 million.

Madam Speaker, since the inception of the MSBG Scheme in 2015, we have assisted 5,853 micro entrepreneurs with the total amount of \$5.5 million. We had embarked on our monitoring exercise at the beginning of 2016 but unfortunately, this was put on hold following *TC Winston*, with the Ministry re-directing its efforts towards the rehabilitation exercise.

Madam Speaker, in terms of funding, I had informed the House that the Indian Government had seen merit in the programme and had committed \$4.7 million. I am pleased to announce that a further support of close to \$5 million would be provided by the Indian Government for the MSBG Scheme. This is a tremendous boost to the Honourable Prime Minister's initiative, whereby it is now possible to assist even more micro and small entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, allow me to present some numbers in terms of the MSBG Scheme. For 2015, we received over 25,789 applications and approved 7,744 requests, an approval rate of around 30 percent. For the latest round, Madam Speaker, that is the 2016-2017 financial year, the total number of applications received stands at 19,850. For this round of applicants, the approval ratings is higher not because we have relaxed the requirements but rather more applicants are meeting the criteria and we envisage close to 11,000 successful applicants for this financial year with the current rate of approvals.

However, the final number of successful recipients will be determined after we complete the validation site visits which we have commenced last week, and we intend to roll out the distribution of grants by the end of this month, beginning in the Northern Division by the Honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is looking to strengthen the MSBG Scheme through a number of avenues which includes assisting successful recipients migrate to financial institutions for additional support and to further expand their businesses. In addition, the Ministry will also identify successful grant recipients, who could be clustered through the use of the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) Model and this will ensure that similar businesses within a locality are able to pool their resources together, and so collectively strengthen these individual businesses by increasing their volume of supply and bargaining power.

Madam Speaker, the Northern Development Programme or NDP as we know it, is also assisting in linking Micro and Small Businesses to financial institutions in the Northern Division and now that the NDP is under the Ministry, successful MSBG recipients in the Northern Division will also be directed towards NDP for further advice and possible assistance.

Madam Speaker, as the Ministry responsible for MSMEs, these current programmes will be further strengthened once the MSME Central Co-ordinating Agency (CCA) is established. Madam Speaker, the Ministry together with the Reserve Bank of Fiji has drafted the legal framework that is currently under consideration, and the Ministry has also received support from the IFC and the World Bank who will provide expert opinion on the draft law and further advisory support in the development of Fiji's MSME Framework.

Madam Speaker, the legal framework will establish the MSMECCA and empower it to develop the MSME sector. This include the co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all MSMEs assisted and established under existing and new Government-led programmes and activities.

A centralised and co-ordinated approach would eliminate, Madam Speaker, duplication of efforts and wastage of resources, and improve operational efficiency and foster the development of the support mechanism for MSMEs. The CCA will also develop a database of all MSME entrepreneurs that will provide better record of MSME's and capture their accurate contribution to the GDP. This will assist the agency in formalising the disadvantaged into the informal sector and ease their access to modern finance and infrastructure.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, to provide the CCA high level direction, we have taken the necessary steps for the establishment of a National MSME Development Council. The terms of reference and membership of the Council has been endorsed. The Council will be chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister and will also be enacted by law.

The Council will be the highest body that will provide the policy direction to establish the conducive environment and opportunities for growth of the MSME sector in Fiji. I wish to inform the Members of this august House that the Council has as members, all Ministers that administer MSME-related programmes and also has private sector representation to allow for inclusiveness in the decision-making. The Secretariat to the National MSME Council will be the MSMECCA.

Madam Speaker, this arrangement will ensure that all ministries and agencies responsible for MSME-related programmes, projects and activities will work in tandem towards achieving a common goal and the inaugural meeting of the National MSME Council will be held later this month.

Madam Speaker, another important project that will involve the MSME sector is a work towards the revitalization of the Co-operative Sector. The Ministry has undertaken an extensive review of the Co-operatives Act, to bring it in line with international practices and we have also progressed well towards the registration of the Fiji Co-operatives College at Lami. This will also contribute towards strengthening of the MSME sector through business development training.

Madam Speaker, all of Governments initiatives and strategies are targeted at ensuring the well-being of all Fijians that are taken into consideration and this has been a very successful MSBGS, IHRDP, NDP and the National Export Strategy (NES). I wish to provide some examples of the successful MSME projects which we intend to build upon.

Firstly, the IHRDP Agricultural Ginger Clusters in Tailevu and Naitasiri achieved a return of investment of 6.8. So, effectively for every dollar spent, the return was \$6.80 and farmers, Madam Speaker, used profits derived by re-investing them in farm operations and to improve their livelihoods.

For economic projects relating to cross-cutting issues, another glaring example is the Lawaki Women's Bakery. They raked in an income of \$25,000 within the first three months of its operation and is currently supplying bread and pastry products to the Tailevu North District and the Queen Victoria School community. Apart from reinvesting their profits into the business, the Women's Group will also use profits derived to fund village social and educational projects, and invest in capital markets.

Madam Speaker, I know this message also comes from the Honourable Prime Minister, this is from Tailevu to Rewa. Madam Speaker, for the province of Rewa the IHRDP funded the Rewa Disabled Organisation which consists of 160 members from 52 villages and settlements. The Organisation received farming implements and agricultural inputs, including three boats and three engines for their water taxi business. The profits derived from their business has been reinvested in the construction of their business setup at Burebasaga Village and also used to fund income-generating projects for their members. Madam Speaker, I wish to reiterate that this Government does not leave any Fijian behind.

Madam Speaker, these are examples of what MSMEs can achieve by providing the right framework, guidance and creation of an enabling and conducive environment, along with the appropriate legislation. We will ensure that the MSMEs sector will thrive and become a leading contributor to the Fijian economy.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, MSMEs have transformed economies of most developing countries and this is also what we intend to achieve.

Madam Speaker, thank you again for this opportunity to highlight some of the key projects that the Ministry is involved in, to build a resilient and robust Fiji.

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

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, I also like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister concerned for the delivery of the statement that we have heard in this august House this afternoon.

Just before we proceed further, Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a few pertinent questions towards this Government's initiative, just to ensure that whatever is intended to achieve at the end of the day, is going to be achieved. There are a few questions that need to be answered by the Ministry concerned, Madam Speaker.

Firstly, which Ministry or who will carry out the necessary selection as to who is to be assisted with this grant? We all know that once the grant is made available by Government, everyone will run towards that and it will be hard for the Government to try and select who is eligible to be assisted with the grant. As outlined by the Honourable Minister, out of the 25,789 applicants, only 7,744 applications were approved, which amounts to about 30 percent and that shows how rigid their selection is.

Secondly, who will provide the necessary small business training, to ensure that the mindsets of these people are geared towards the various businesses that they are going to engage in?

Thirdly, who will monitor all these grants that are given out by Government to ensure that it will achieve its intended outcome at the end of the day?

Based on the grant that have been given so far of \$1,000 and if that grant is used in any one month, turn it around twice with a 10 percent interest rate, they will only gain a gross profit of about \$200, and \$200 is not even enough to meet all their business costs, if that is the case, Madam Speaker. And by doing that, they will keep on eating up the grant, rather than using the profit alone and at the end of the day, they will not be able to survive.

We also note, Madam Speaker, that this grant is being managed by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and the Fiji Development Bank (FDB). Why do we have two organisations like that managing an operation such as this? One should be bold enough to come forward and take ownership of the project because at the end of the day, if the project fails, they will be blaming each other as opposed to having one of them willing to take ownership of the sale.

Madam Speaker, at the same time, we also note that FDB has been used a lot by this grant that is being channelled out by Government and all the services that they rendered towards this assistance, who is going to pay for that? We all know that FDB is there to provide services but the services have to be paid, they are not a charitable organisation.

To provide an alternative to that, Madam Speaker, I think it is proper that all the allocations under this grant should be channeled towards the FDB, out of which they should be encouraged to provide the necessary training to the recipients who are willing to take up these small grants and assistance should only be given to people who pass the necessary training. They should also be given a total loan of \$4,000 and the grant of \$1,000 is to be added onto that, to make \$5,000 working capital that is suitable to start up their small business.

With that \$5,000 combination of working capital, they should be able to generate, at least, a gross

profit of \$1,000 in any one month, if you turn it around twice at 10 percent interest rate. That will then be sufficient for them to be able to generate the necessary development within the economy, in order to expand their business further. Otherwise, Madam Speaker, all these grants that have been given to the recipients will be a futile exercise, and will just end up in buying votes for the upcoming General Elections. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement on Micro and Small Business Grants.

Madam Speaker, I actually believe that SMEs have a lot to contribute and in fact, if you look at the statistics in many developing countries, SMEs create the largest number of jobs when put collectively. So, I think there is real potential if these grants are used wisely, properly, efficiently and not necessarily for campaign purposes. We could really make a big difference.

I want to pick on the very positive thing that the Honourable Minister said, and that was the revitalisation of the cooperatives. I am not so sure whether his idea of centralising the distribution of grants is going to be the most effective way to make an impact. We know that there is a very strong potential for SMEs in three sectors - the agriculture sector, forestry sector and fisheries sector. . Unfortunately, for us, and I think the Honourable Minister in one of his previous statements did talk about working with the Minister for Agriculture, and I think that is a positive thing because the agriculture sector has a lot of potential. We know that our growth in the agriculture sector has not been very good over the last so many years and that is where, I think, we should focus this micro and small business grants and also explore the possibility of cooperatives.

I think cooperatives, as evidenced in other countries, when they are managed and resourced well, provided with all the support - extension, training and research, cooperatives can make a lot of difference in the primary sectors, in coming up with potential for growth development. So, I think there is an opportunity here for us to make a real difference, and the fact that we are receiving support, especially from the Government of India, is an indication and I think India has a lot of potential. They have a lot of good practices of SMEs and cooperatives, especially women cooperatives, where they have done very well when supported with the appropriate structure. I am also not sure whether centralising, as I said earlier, into one ministry is the right way to go.

Perhaps, we need to look at these three sectors - the Fisheries Sector, Forestry Sector and Agriculture Sector. I am sure when Honourable Prem Singh responds to the Ministerial Statement on forestry, he is going to suggest things that might be supported through MSBG. I think there is a potential to look at some decentralisation into different Ministries; Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, the coordinating mechanism in terms of data and making sure that the outcomes are good and can be centrally controlled, but not everything from one Ministry.

I also want to raise this question to the Honourable Minister and he may want to answer this. This is a comment about FDB, and I was quite surprised that the Chief Executive Officer who is leading now, said that the issues are about the cost of grants, et cetera. It appeared to me that there is some tension there, with respect to how FDB was managing the grants, so the Honourable Minister may want

to clarify that.

But all in all, Madam Speaker, I think there is a lot of potential, and I would like the Honourable Minister to reconsider the idea of centralisation, think about decentralisation, and I like his very positive statement on revitalisation of cooperatives, and I hope that some grants would be channelled through those revitalised cooperatives.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Minister for Forests to deliver his statement.

Assistance towards TC Winston Rehabilitation – Update Of

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon to you all.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Forests has been committed to improving its service delivery to the people of Fiji during the past six months.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry would like to provide an update to this august House on the work that we had been doing with regards to providing assistance to those who had been severely affected during *TC Winston*.

The focus of the assistance that is being offered by my Ministry was to enable the utilization of fallen trees for the immediate construction of homes to affected places, including Taveuni, Vanua Balavu, Yacata, Koro, Ovalau, Moturiki, part of Viti Levu and part of Vanua Levu. The total amount of timber that has been recovered from this exercise to-date is equivalent to the timber needed for the construction of over 400 homes.

Madam Speaker, our development partners often play a vital role in providing assistance during our time of need. My Ministry was able to secure FJ\$0.3 million from our international donors, to assist in our relief efforts. This assistance was provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Mission 21, a US-faith based organisation. The assistance from Mission 21 involved the provision of seven portable sawmills, and it was our duty to provide the training for the users and also distribute sawmills to the affected communities.

As for the assistance that was provided by FAO, two portable sawmills were provided, including full accessories, such as protective clothing for the operators and fund to pay for the operations. This is in addition to the seven portable sawmills purchased by the Ministry for this purpose. This assistance provided by our development partners has immensely complemented our effort in providing the needed support towards the affected communities for their home construction needs.

Madam Speaker, forests are vital for providing the needed and often taken for granted ecosystem services that we need in order to support our very livelihoods. Such ecosystem services include clean water, the regulation of stream flows, protection of biodiversity, wild animal habitat, and many others. Significant areas of both planted and natural forests were severely damaged during *TC Winston*.

My Ministry has further embarked on a project for the rehabilitation and replanting of trees in severely degraded forest areas. This activity will ensure the quick recovery of Fiji's degraded forest areas, in order to enable them to keep on providing their vital ecosystems functions.

In this regard, my Ministry had worked in collaboration with communities and planted 348 hectares of new forests following *TC Winston*. My Ministry is also working in collaboration with environmental NGOs and statutory organisations such as the WAF, in addressing the management and conservation of Fiji's water catchments. Under this initiative, my Ministry will be reforesting degraded water catchment areas and upper river banks to reduce the impacts of droughts, flooding and maintain water quality. These activities show further commitment towards the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goal 15 "Life on Land".

Madam Speaker, my Ministry will continue to play its part towards Fiji's national recovery efforts, while ensuring the continued sustainability of our forest resources and its ecosystems.

I wish to extend my appreciation to the Government for the strong support during the recovery period.

May God bless each and every one of us. Thank you.

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

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, in spite of the efforts by the Ministry of Forests in rebuilding houses, our commiseration and thoughts are with those who are still living in tents and the students who are having their education in tents during this depression that our country is going through.

I have a few issues that I would to raise in terms of ownership and remuneration of the harvesting of fallen trees, whether the owners are properly remunerated as to forestry requirements in terms of royalties.

For quality code, for fallen trees whether these trees are matured enough in terms of size of logs, in terms of quality of treatment to adhere to the building code that has been highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Economy. So, the success of the buildings to sustain or even to be able to stand up to TC Category 5 like *TC Winston* is under question because of the quality code that I referred to in terms of the timber that is being produced locally by the Ministry of Forests.

In terms of the Pine Schemes in Dawasamu, Bua, Nanoko, Ra, Vanua Balavu, Moturiki and Ovalau as mentioned in the speech by the Honorable Minister for Forests, I did not hear any mention of harvesting those fallen pine trees, as well as there was an expression of interest immediately after *TC Winston* for the pine in Cicia and Lakeba.

Those are the islands that were being advertised in the dailies for the Expression of Interest for harvesting those pine trees to rehabilitate in terms of supply of logs and timber because we went through a situation where, for one year now the lack of materials. We have mahogany plantation, logs that have been left unprocessed, I am referring to Waivunu as well as the Sustainable Mahogany Industry (SMI)

that was there, that needed processing to go into this rehabilitation programme.

If you go up Wairiki in Bua, you can see pine logs that are lying on the road, that were not processed, that could have easily been used for this programme and the replanting programme for the biodiversity and the return of original status of the land. Pine and mahogany are introduced species that they have a damaging impact on the environment.

Mahogany is known to have devastated the river streams and has totally taken out the source of resources in terms of the resources of the rivers. So, indigenous species are encouraged to be planted in those islands like *Koro*, rather than introducing foreign species because they do more damage than what we hope to achieve in addressing climate change as we know, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Ministerial Statement. May I start by thanking the Honourable Minister for taking the initiative of recovering timber from fallen trees, as a result of *TC Winston* and any natural disaster.

Madam, as you know, this leaves a lot of deforestation, damage to our natural habitat and the amount of timber that has been recovered. According to the Ministerial Statement, this is commendable Honourable Minister and I am sure that the recovery of timber has gone through a process, as alluded to by my colleague, that reflects the quality of timber needs to be used in the building industry.

Having said that, now is the time Honourable Minister for your Ministry to take a one step up approach and that is go to reforestation and reforestation, not only indigenous timbers, but with the view of planting value-added or priced species like mahogany, pine and sandalwood.

In these areas, Madam Speaker, let me give an example, the sandalwood industry is a very priced one, a very priced commodity which has long-term benefits and we should now put all our efforts into going into a National Sandalwood Plan. I say this because sandalwood is one tree that is very sensitive to grow. Once planted, it has to be complemented with other plants for its survival and good growth.

Madam Speaker, a National Sandalwood Plan will contribute a lot to the nation, as you know that most of our resource owners, people with long-term leases, they do not have any savings due for their twilight years, like FNPF and the sandalwood is managed and forested in such a way that it can produce similar benefits for a saving like the FNPF for the resource owners who do not have any savings of their own.

In conclusion, may I say that let us emulate some of the undertakings of our visionary leaders of the past who had the vision and undertook to plant pine and mahogany and the benefits we are reaping today. Let this generation embark on something like a National Sandalwood Plan for its price and value so that the Fijian people can have long-term sustained benefits. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, that brings to the end the Ministerial Statements.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, we were given a schedule consisting of five Ministerial

Statements, one of which was the MSG Agreement, so we were very keen to hear about it. Will that happen later?

HON. SPEAKER.- No, that is probably for Thursday. It is not in today's Order Paper.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Will we have that later because we are very keen to know about the MSG? Thursday, I thought he was going to get away with it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I never run away from anything.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Item in our Order Paper.

On the Consideration of Bills, I have been informed that there are no Bills being introduced today. We will, therefore, move on to the next item of business, which is the motion by the Leader of the Government in Parliament.

However, I have been requested by the Leader of the Government in Parliament that because of a ceremony that is going to be happening very soon, if we can move this item to Wednesday 8th February, 2017. The item is on the motion by the Leader of the Government in Parliament.

Does anyone oppose this request?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, that brings to the end our sitting for today. I, therefore, adjourn this sitting until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.08 p.m.