

WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 2014

The Parliament resumed at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 14th October, 2014, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. CMD. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Votes cast:

| | | |
|--------|---|----|
| Ayes | - | 47 |
| Absent | - | 3 |

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Honourable Members – Late Arrival

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have observed from several sittings that some Members have arrived late. This is regrettable. I would ask that honourable Members make every endeavour to arrive on time and be seated before proceedings commence with the saying of the Prayer. After all, this is only courteous and respectful to all other fellow colleagues. Wherever possible, I would ask that honourable Members not leave the Chamber for lengthy periods. Again, I believe it is only courteous to stay and listen to other honourable Members speaking.

Honourable Members are also reminded that they have an obligation to attend meetings of Parliament and if they wish to be absent, they should seek leave of absence by writing to the Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 141.

I do appreciate that honourable Members, particularly Ministers, do have other responsibilities but I would ask that Members give it their highest priority to attending Parliament over other commitments, particularly given the sitting schedule agreed to yesterday.

Discourteous Use of Language

On another matter, I would draw honourable Members' attention to discourteous use of language in the Chamber. Honourable Members should use temperate and polite language at all times, be it whilst speaking, making an interjection, or as an aside.

I appreciate that some Members will be frustrated or perhaps even annoyed by what others might say. However, that is no excuse for bad language which may be picked up on the sound system. That would not only reflect badly on the Member concerned, but also on the Parliament as an institution.

I would ask that honourable Members take on board my well-intended remarks in the future.

Apology

I would like to offer my apologies to the Parliament for my reciting the Prayer on Monday, 13th October, 2014 where I did not strictly follow the Prayer required under the Standing Orders. Such an error will not occur again.

Time Limit on Debate

I wish to remind honourable Members again that the Secretary General will ring the bell at 5 minutes and then one minute before a Member's allocated time is up. So, I would expect honourable Members to keep within their time limits. However, some of you will not be utilising their full 20 minutes, therefore would be running ahead of schedule. In that case, the Chair will decide on the time for adjournment for tea and lunch breaks.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE MOTION TO THANK HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament. I, along with other Members of this House would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment as the first lady Speaker of this Parliament

I would also like to congratulate other women Members in this Chamber, beginning with the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the two other lady Members from the Opposition, and the women Members on this side of the House who are either Ministers or Assistant Ministers.

Madam Speaker, I am originally from Batiri Village in the *tikina* of Malomalo, in the province of Nadroga. I was bred and brought up in my mum's village (Tore) which sits right next to the honourable Viliame Gavoka's Sila village in the *tikina* of Cuvu, in the rugby province of Nadroga.

I hold Tore village in the *tikina* of Cuvu dear to my heart, as this was where my very humble beginning started in my childhood days. I always admire my relatives from the three nearby villages (Naevuevu, Sila and Tore) who always stand on the roadside every morning to connect their bus to work at the nearby Shangri-La's Fijian Resort. From then on, it was no turning back for me as I promised myself that in years to come I would be one of them.

All these eventuated after graduating with a Diploma in Hotel Management. Pacific Harbour Resort was my first taste of paradise. From Pacific Harbour to the old Reef Hotel (now the Outrigger on the Lagoon) and then to the Hyatt (now Warwick Fiji Resort). Shangri-La's Fijian Resort was my

next stopover before connecting South Sea Cruises, to Plantation Island Resort, Malolo Island Resort and then to Castaway Island Resort.

Madam Speaker, as a true son of Nadroga, I am proud to have been associated with the province's contribution towards our national economy, which includes agriculture, tourism, forestry and sports, to name a few. Thus, Madam Speaker, I would urge all honourable Members of this august Parliament, to use and devote their untapped natural resources to better their living standards.

Madam Speaker, I would like to pay special thanks to the *Na Kalevu kei na Vanua o Nakuruvakarua; Tui Vusu kei na Vanua o Vusu; Tui Davutukia kei na Vanua o Davutukia; Tui Conua kei na Vanua o Conua; Vanua Tube i Noqi; Vanua o Koroivabekwa; Tui Navatusila kei na Vanua o Navatusila; Tabanivono kei na Vanua o Tabanivono, Tabanivono i Wai; Werelevu Nahoho Waqa, Tui Nalolo kei na Vanua o Nalolo; Vanua Nakaria; Na Momo na Tui Lawa kei na Viaguane, na Vunihalevu, Vatulele,*

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the hardworking FijiFirst Team of Nadroga.

These are significant days in our nation's life as we have the first sitting of the new Parliament under Fiji's new Constitution after a very open and transparent General Elections. This great nation of ours has been through a lot. With every birth comes pain. This great nation of ours has been reborn and the people of our beloved country have given a clear mandate to the Government for the change. To continue the creation and a strong national identity, promotion of equality for all citizens, promotion of good governance and transparency which leads to socio-economic development.

As the Deputy Speaker of the House, under our Constitution, it is my duty to perform to the best of my ability. I would also like to thank honourable Members for their vote of confidence in electing me as the Deputy Speaker of this Parliament.

As the Deputy Speaker, I must of course be of assistance to you, Madam Speaker. I must also ensure that I provide decisive leadership to this Parliament, that the Constitution is upheld at all times, both in spirit and in practice and that all honourable Members adhere strictly to the Standing Orders. After all, not to do so would not only be unconstitutional, but undermine this august Parliament and bring disrepute. We, then, should not be called honourable. It will undermine public confidence in the very institution that we have been entrusted with.

Madam Speaker, as a candidate for the Election, I visited so many villages and settlements. I noted how much people appreciated good service, better roads, hospital, health centres and assistances with their problems. Not failing to mention the Government's forecast on improving education, especially the scholarships and loans given by the Government.

We have an excellent opportunity to show the people that their everyday lives can be improved through the Government's various initiatives, as mentioned by His Excellency the President.

I would like to thank His Excellency the President for his eloquent speech to this Parliament, outlining what the Government intends to do in the next four years.

Last but not the least, I would like to pay tribute to my late father, Mr. Isikeli Nadalo, who was a Member of Parliament in this very building. I also would also like to thank my wife, Apisaki, my son Hekacula and my daughter Timaima.

I am humbly privileged and thankful to have been elected to this august Parliament, as someone from Nadroga, Navosa.

I would also like to thank my campaign managers in Nadroga, Navosa, who really assisted me during the General Elections.

With this Madam Speaker, I thank you for your patience, *Vinaka Vakalevu, Dhanyabad* and *Shukria*.

(Acclamation)

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, I would first like to join the honourable Members on both sides of this dignified Chamber, who have spoken before me in thanking His Excellency the President for his inspiring and encouraging Address at the opening of this sitting of Parliament.

I would like to acknowledge our Heavenly Father, the Lord Almighty for being my pillar of strength and my divine inspiration during this General Elections in which the honourable Prime Minister led our Fiji First political movement to victory.

I wish to extend my humble gratitude to the honourable Prime Minister for his wisdom and foresight in championing a development programme that is inclusive of all Fijians. I join him in his commitment to serving the needs of people from all backgrounds, and from all parts of our country and I look forward to working with him and my fellow Cabinet Ministers to move Fiji forward in the coming years. Sir, thank you for the confidence you have placed in me to serve our beloved nation as the Minister for Fisheries and Forests.

Madam Speaker, I also extend my warm congratulations to you in your appointment as Speaker. I have no doubt that with your able command of this Chamber, you will steer us through the uncharted waters ahead.

Madam Speaker, I fully support the sentiments expressed by His Excellency that Members of this dignified House should work together constructively, and create a positive atmosphere for discussing and debating the issues that matters most to those who have sent us here - the people of Fiji.

I urge us all to follow His Excellency's wise words to make our debates less personal, less aggressive and more focussed on building a better Fiji that is prosperous, secure, peaceful and united.

We all know that political stability is crucial for enhancing confidence, increasing investment and encouraging economic growth. It is our responsibility, as elected representatives of the people, to promote and sustain a stable political environment. The Government, also through its various programmes and initiatives, will focus on securing this stability.

Madam Speaker, before I elaborate on my Ministry's core functions and its current and future plans, I want to take this opportunity to thank all my supporters, especially the pine industry stakeholders for their overwhelming support during this General Elections. Of course, I would also like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and advice during the course of this gruelling campaign.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries and Forests is the custodian of two of our nation's most important resources.

I am very aware of the great expectations the people of Fiji have for my Ministry, to produce social, economic, environment development within these two sectors in the medium and long-term. I pledge to them my absolute commitment and the best of my ability.

The guiding principle of the Ministry is to help Fiji achieve economic growth, while at the same time ensuring economic sustainability. This overarching mandate has seen a shift in focus from the individual components of the sectors, to a more integrated and holistic approach that I will continue to champion as Minister. Close cooperation with other government ministries, departments and agencies, together with the civil society, the private sector and the local communities are very important to me.

Our nation's fisheries and forests promote food security for our people, create income generating activities and offer a wide range of employment opportunities. In working to spread these benefits to as many Fijians as possible, it is critical to understand that our interests and activities align with, and in some instances overlap with those of other ministries. For example, there are a number of areas, such as creating more economic opportunities for women, supporting small and medium enterprises and boosting Fiji's food security, where close cooperation is essential to ensure the most efficient use of Government resources to achieve the maximum impact for the most number of people.

Perhaps, most importantly, we need to work closely with the Ministry of Environment to address the important issue of climate change. Things like our reforestation programmes, REDD+, the Reef to Ridge initiative and the Reef Enhancement Programme are a few examples of ways the Ministry can complement the work being done elsewhere.

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge that there is growing concern amongst stakeholders about the continued existence of illegal activities in relation to the harvesting of forest and fishery resources. We are firmly committed to tackling this problem by boosting our monitoring, surveillance and compliance operations, and by adopting the appropriate legal framework to control and minimise these unwarranted and hostile activities, to ensure that these resources continue to provide economic returns for generations to come. Therefore, one of my first duty will be to review and finalise new fishery and forest sector legislation to enhance our ability to perform these core functions across the nation.

Madam Speaker, the forestry sector contributes 1.3 per cent to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2014 alone, projections were \$32 million or two per cent of GDP. Actual domestic exports from 2010 to 2013 averaged \$67.4 million annually, whilst forecasts for 2014 to 2016 are predicted at \$99.5 million annually. To increase GDP and further boost our exports, Madam Speaker, my Ministry has been focussing its research on high yields and highly valued products that will generate greater and more sustainable returns. I will continue with this important work.

Madam Speaker, we also aim to complete the National Forest Inventory in 2015, which will give us a comprehensive insight into the distribution, density and composition of our country's forests, together with detailed forest cover maps. This will be an invaluable resource as we plan for future development and programmes.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry will continue to work closely with our NGO partners and related Government ministries and departments to ensure that Fiji's biodiversity is protected. The forest ecosystem is an important source of fresh water supply, food security, medicine and bio-fuel, to name

a few, and it is essential that we continue to be diligent in order to conserve these resources for future generations.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry reviewed and launched the Fiji National Harvesting Code of Practice in 2013, with the aim of reducing illegal activities in all forest harvesting operations. Future plans of establishing a full scale reforestation programme for the nation is currently being pursued and is planned to begin in 2015. Research into best practices, new methods of planting, and the harvesting of quality forest products will continue to form a critical focus of my Ministry.

To contribute to Government's goal to provide affordable housing in the maritime areas, my Ministry will continue to support the Pine Harvesting Scheme for Gau and Cicia. The ultimate aim of this project is to assist pine resource owners to build new homes, or upgrade existing ones by ensuring that stocks are managed in a sustainable manner and by assisting with replanting for future generations.

Madam Speaker, the Fisheries Sector contributes three per cent to GDP and accounts for 10 per cent of our nation's exports. Fiji's inshore fisheries offer huge potential in terms of income-generating projects. For example, the Seaweed Project has already achieved a great amount of success, and I acknowledge my predecessor, the honourable Minister for Agriculture for his visionary leadership in this area. We will look into how we can replicate and expand this model to benefit more communities in Fiji.

We will also continue to undertake and facilitate the development of aquaculture through private sector initiative. Farming both freshwater fish, prawns and sea-prawns are our major targets.

Aquaculture provides security. It relieves pressure on our over-exploited inshore fisheries, and it offers a source of income for families and communities. We have three hatcheries currently in operation – Naduruloulou, Ba and Galoa, and are fast tracking work to complete another in Ra in 2015. Working together, these hatcheries support our goal to encourage private enterprise by supplying fingerlings and post larvae to both established and new farmers.

I am also pleased to say, Madam Speaker, that over the last few years, Fiji has started to export fish fillets, tuna loins, tuna steaks, and other products which go straight onto supermarket shelves in Australia and New Zealand, in addition to whole fish. I look forward to working with the Ministry of Industry and Trade to search for new markets, for these products so that we can continue to expand this industry.

I also intend to do more, to take advantage of our strategic location, infrastructure and workforce to entice fishing vessels that fish in this region to offload their fish here in Fiji, which would further strengthen our processing and value adding operations.

Of course, the tuna industry is particularly important to our fisheries sector, and I will give it my full attention as Minister. I believe the endorsement of the Tuna Management and Development Plan 2014-2018, and the National Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing address a number of the pressing issues that face the industry.

We have also boosted the ranks of our Offshore Fisheries Division to better monitor the fishing that is taking place in our waters. This is the result of the Ministry's review of the Fisheries Act, which dates back to 1942. Three new pieces of legislation, focussing on the three fisheries; Offshore, Inshore and Aquaculture will modernise our laws to ensure that our fisheries are managed and developed in a sustainable fashion. We will fast track the Inshore and Aquaculture legislation to bring it into force alongside the Offshore Decree as quickly as possible.

The remaining policies to be submitted in the next few months are the National Plan of Action on Sharks, the strategy for Fijian vessels fishing outside Fiji's jurisdiction, and the conservation and management measures for the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

Madam Speaker, research is a very important responsibility of my Ministry. We will foster closer collaboration with partners such as the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the South Pacific Commission (SPC), and we will continue to promote projects like that currently being undertaken on Makogai Island.

Another exciting area of research is our surveys of the diversity, health and size of the fish population in the 410 *qoliqoli* around Fiji, of which 196 have already been completed. We will continue with this important initiative that allows us to better allocate resources and develop new policies and programmes.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I feel very privileged to be a Member of this Parliament. I will draw on my own particular skills, experience and believes to ensure that my work reflects Government's values and vision for our national development.

I will never forget that politics is about people, and that people can make a difference. That is why I am here. I look forward to playing my part in building an even better Fiji, and thank honourable Members for your attention.

God Bless Fiji.

Thank you, *bahut dhanyavad, vinaka vakalevu*

(Acclamation)

HON. RATU. S. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, I also rise to join my honourable member colleagues of this August Parliament, in offering my humble congratulations to you as the first lady Speaker of our Parliament.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. RATU S. NANOVO.- I would fail miserably in my duties, if I did not also congratulate my own party leader *na Gone Marama Bale*, Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa, as Fiji's first lady Leader of the Opposition.

Well before this Elections was announced, when times were difficult and many were silent, yours was the lone voice of Opposition, boldly and bravely stating your convictions at great personal cost. Madam Leader of the Opposition, I celebrate and salute your stout resolve that has brought us here today.

Madam Speaker, I firmly believe that your landmark appointment, together with that of the Leader of the Opposition, will inspire many young women and that sometime in the not too distant future, a lady will sit across us as Fiji's first woman Prime Minister.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU S. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, it is indeed a prodigious honour and privilege to be part of this House, the new Parliament of Fiji after a lapse of eight years.

To that end, Madam Speaker, I would firstly like to thank my Party Leader, Madam Leader of the Opposition and her management team for having faith in me, and selecting me on their slate of candidates as a representative of my Province, Kadavu in the last General Elections.

May I also take this opportunity to thank my immediate family members, my wife, Vasemaca, my three daughters Merewalesi, Rusila and Amalaini, my son in law, Jone Vodo, my sister, Mrs Ratukalou, my brother in laws, Mr Ratukalou and Mr Tamani, for standing by me throughout the arduous process we had to endure before being confirmed as a candidate.

Madam Speaker, I would like to convey my heartfelt thankfulness to the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) management team on the island of Kadavu, beginning with the President, Mr Sailasa Matea and all his team members from all the *tikinas* in Kadavu.

Madam Speaker, I would be failing in my duty if I do not also mention all the hard work my family members in the chiefly village of Tavuki, Namuana, throughout Kadavu, here on Viti Levu, Levuka and the Lomaiviti Group, as well as relatives overseas for their great contribution towards my success at the polls.

Thank you all very much for a job well done. Without your assistance, I would not be standing here in this Parliament today.

Madam Speaker, I also take this opportunity to thank the Vanua of Nacolase, Koroisoso, Valesasa, Nabala, Koroivabea, Naivibati, Namanusa and Waimalua for the tremendous support they have bestowed to the *Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi* and myself during the last General Elections, and we will request our Almighty God to bless each and every one of them in the years ahead.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to thank all the people from all over Fiji who, by their precious votes, expressed their faith in me to serve this country.

Over the next four years, I tender my most solemn undertaking to you Madam Speaker, and all the honourable Members that I will listen, learn and serve, putting my personal prejudices and political differences aside to be the best possible servant I can be of our great island nation. And in this, I humbly invite the honourable members of Government to join with us in the spirit of this undertaking.

Madam Speaker, sitting here today is the culmination of a lifelong dream to serve this great nation at the highest possible level, a representative of the people. Like many of us, my personal journey to these august Chamber in the late 1960s and early 1970s started in a remote rural-dwelling, lacking many resources and bereft of modern conveniences. It was a difficult journey in terms of education and health services, and growing up in Maritime Provinces is always is always a challenge when we refer to affordable and accessible shipping services.

While a large part of my personal dream and motivation is to try and reduce, if not eradicate the problems I faced as a child in terms of achieving tertiary education for those following behind me, even today one only has to listen to vernacular radio, to still hear public notices sent out by urban families, alerting a relative that his or her fare has been paid to the shipping company office in Suva, and he or she has to get onto the next available boat service.

Such is the cost of basic transportation that it cannot be readily accessed by all of our people. To this day, for many of us, basic boat fare to Suva from any island we care to name, Madam Speaker, still remains a rare luxury.

To that end, Madam Speaker, I would like to share with the honourable members of this House some of the pertinent issues I face in my personal experience and are still very much evident on my recent campaign trail, that is, the development challenges experienced by rural and maritime groups.

Firstly, the high cost of living: Because of their remoteness from Fiji's main urban-centers, remote islands and villages continue to face the high cost of transport, resulting in the high cost of goods and services when these goods and services reach their final destination.

When that happens Madam Speaker, the peoples' purchasing power, coupled with their earning potential in those remote locations is much weakened, compared to their urban counterparts. This is an ongoing challenge faced by a large sections of our population, and I beg the honourable Members in this Parliament to establish national policies and strategies to solve these issues once and for all.

Secondly, on the lack of infrastructure development: Infrastructure development, especially in the maritime zone, Madam Speaker is of great concern to me and I plead with the Government to address these issues urgently. An example are the roads on the beautiful island of Gau, where some villages must now board an outboard motor boat to get to the airport.

Roads that once, existed facilitating island produce for sale, in Suva, Lautoka and Nadi, are now impassable. Likewise, on my home island of Kadavu, the road linking Vunisea to Nabukelevu-i-Ra is treacherous in bad wealth conditions.

Another related issue is the construction of new jetties, and the safe maintenance of exiting jetties. In this area I would urgently recommend a stock of the current state and safe serviceability of existing jetties, with an urgent need of analysing of new jetties.

A very serious problem that still plagues our rural areas Madam Speaker, is the lack of safe water for drinking and sanitation purposes. By no means, I claim technical knowledge, but when I read about my *tauvu* relatives in the Yasawas, and Lau groups, and the chronic water shortage they face, I am often baffled, because there is brilliant sunshine almost year around and ocean of sea water surrounding them.

Would I be way out line Madam Speaker, to ask, why do not we have solar-powered desalination plants in these islands? Sort of sinking my fishing hook into the Yasawa islands and dragging them close to Kadavu to top up their water tanks. This simple solution and exercise does not even have to be a Government initiative.

There must be hundreds, if not thousands of environment NGOs out there that already have the solutions to our problems and we could go along a way by asking to share resources with them. We could appeal to the UNDP for their global best practices network, to share their knowledge with us and pilot various models of safe water and sanitation to alleviate this continuing problem.

I have also invited Ono Lailai to move their island next to Ono in Kadavu for water tank top ups...

(Laughter)

...but quickly realised that Ono Lailai is already blessed by nature with over abundant beauty and resources, as can be clearly seen in these Chamber.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Shipping links between the maritime zones and main urban centres in Fiji is of very great and a continuing concern. I would urge all of us to work across party lines, to come up with solutions to solve this problem by providing safe, regular and reliable shipping service solutions for all of our populated islands.

If nothing else, Madam Speaker, we must eradicate the poverty of opportunity.

The provision of shipping services cannot be solely determined by market forces. Social and development related issues must be factored into national shipping services, even if a hefty government subsidy is required.

For our large island populations, roads are built free of charge and transportation is relatively cheap, supported by economies of scale. It costs under F\$2 to travel from Suva to Nausori. Cost of the same distance in a hired outboard motor boat, I do not dare imagine. This, Madam Speaker, is an injustice and will continue to keep our people in poverty, if it is not addressed.

Madam Speaker, the constant, reliable, affordable supply of electricity is an issue that is of great national concern, further heightened in rural areas and the maritime zones by its scarcity and extremely high costs.

Since the price of carbon-based fuel will continue to increase in the foreseeable future and it is often subject to global geopolitical forces, we, as a nation must urgently and very seriously examine sustainable energy, especially solar panels and wind powered generators. Current regulatory restrictions in place must be lifted and substantive incentives put in place to assist our populations, to look at alternatives renewable energy resources.

This, Madam Speaker, may require a rethink of the role of the Fiji Electricity Authority. The FEA cannot continue to be regarded as a monolithic monopoly, controlling all of the power supply of this country. Perhaps, FEA can restructure their mindset as a facilitator and provider of alternatives sources of energy, whose mission and vision is to ensure that all of Fiji's people can access power easily and if possible, freely.

If this challenge can be adequately addressed, access to the world information highway can be accomplished, and we can benefit from sources of information and modern wonders such as telemedicine to assist our remote populations.

Cyclone warning and readiness messages can reach all of our people in no time, where they can see and hear what they must do to remain safe from natural disasters.

Educational resources for teachers and students can be readily available, removing the disadvantage of their remote locations, if power is readily and cheaply available.

As the effects of global economy and environmental concerns like rising sea levels present themselves as extreme challenges on our meagre national resources, we must position ourselves in readiness to cope with these issues.

Thirdly, health issues: Madam Speaker, our rural based populations continue to face staffing and facility challenges when it comes to provision of medical services. The lack of either staff to be deployed or the lack of medical centres, forcing rural populations to travel vast distances to access medical care must be solved and solved quickly as a matter of national priority. Like the most

advanced governments and forward-looking people, very serious considerations must be given to free medicine or affordable subsidised prices.

Fiji must institute better maternal child health care facilities and improve on our infant mortality rates. The health of our mothers and children must be a national priority, with the provision of free high quality pre-natal and post-natal health services.

Madam Speaker, I do not pretend to carry the mandate of the disabled community in this august Parliament. There are others amongst us more highly qualified, but it needs to be said that our national perspective and facilities for the disabled amongst us is appalling. Unless and until we can change the national mindset and integrate the needs of the disabled as an integral of our development policies, the way we look at and treat the misfortunate amongst us will continue to be a national disgrace.

Madam Speaker, I tender my sincere apologies for the very loud sigh of relief you may have heard, but as I resume my seat, I wish to say this in closing. My political party leader and indeed the paramount chief of my confederacy, Burebasaga is indeed the *Gone Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi* and it is my birthright to be her loyal subject.

However, Madam, I will take the liberty and reserve the right to call on your good office and your kind support, as I also call on honourable Members of this Parliament for assistance and advice, enabling me to be a trustworthy and hardworking representative of all Fiji's people. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

(Acclamation)

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, it is a great honour for me to be making my maiden speech, having won a Fiji First seat in the recent Elections and also been appointed Assistant Minister for Education, Arts and Heritage.

I am proud to be standing here, representing the Fijian people and humbled to have been chosen for such an important portfolio to assist my Minister, the honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Our task is to continue the Bainimarama Government's education revolution and continue to equip our young people for the clever country we intend to become. I pledge before you all today that I will carry out that vital task to the best of my ability and always work for the benefit of our young people.

Madam Speaker, like others before me, I want to congratulate you for having been elected to your own high office and in the process, advancing the course of women in Fiji.

As other speakers have noted, we have a long way to go to achieve proper equality for our women but you and other women in this Chamber are leading the way. And can I say as Assistant Minister for Education, that you are all wonderful role models for the girls and young women in our schools, universities and technical colleges.

We must build an educational system, totally dedicated to empowering young women to be able to reach their full potential in whatever paths in life they may chose. And we must always do whatever we can to change the mindset of some of our young men, who still regard women as objects rather than equal partners.

As the honourable Prime Minister has so often said “Real men do not hit women. Real men respect and protect women” and that is a lesson that starts in our schools, where we must always teach the values of equality, fairness and justice.

Madam Speaker, I have many people to acknowledge and thank for the positive influence they have had on my life. There is no time to name them all here but many of them know who they are and how important they have been to me personally.

I especially thank the team at Fiji First for their support during the General Elections campaign. I owe a great deal to the movement for the confidence it has shown in me. I especially thank the honourable Prime Minister for having the confidence in me and also the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice for his wise counsel and support. It is a great privilege to be part of this Government and to be able to contribute to our new democracy.

Of course, in a personal sense, I, like others in this Parliament, have led the infinite good fortune of a happy home life and I want to salute my wife, Kiman Nath for her love and support, and for always being a pillar of strength for me. She has been a busy wife but has always had time for me and my concerns, and for that I will always be grateful. No doubt, many of you also have a wife and partners who were willing, during the campaign, to have opened the doors of your home until 3 a.m. It was that kind of support that got me or many of us across the line.

I also want to acknowledge my mother, Latchmi Nath for her support during the campaign, and indeed all my life and my sister, Irene Chandra for her valuable advice, which was always to encourage me to put my country's needs before my own.

Madam Speaker, I hail from Koroqaqa, Baulevu Road, Nausori in the district of Naitasiri. I completed my primary education at Koroqaqa Primary School and secondary education at Baulevu High School, followed by Form 7 at Vunimono High School.

My parents always instilled in me the importance of hard work. It was a great honour to be named dux of the school and I was aspired to go on to university. But like many ordinary Fijian families, this was out of the question because we simply did not have the money as a family to fulfil my dream. I had three other siblings who also needed to be educated at secondary schools and we simply did not have the resources for higher education. My father was the only income-earner in the family and life was a struggle, so much so that my grandfather kept us going financially for a large portion of my childhood.

Madam Speaker, had the Bainimarama Government been in power 25 years ago, how much different my life would have been. I could have fulfilled my dream of moving from high school to university, perhaps by getting one of the “toppers scholarships”, or certainly by obtaining a TELs loan.

As it was, I was only able to go to university after I entered the workforce. I became a teacher at the Vunimono High School and began to study at USP with the money I earned teaching, first at Vunimono and then at Saraswati College. It was the beginning of a long association with the education system. I have been a Board Member of Baulevu High School and Koroqaqa Primary School, Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Governors of both these institutions, chairperson for Naitasiri District Advisory Council, school manager of Baulevu High School and Koroqaqa Primary School and the Central/Eastern Education Board. I have also been active in the community, through a range of organisations such as the Nausori Multicultural Centre, the Naitasiri Provincial Council and the Central/Eastern Rural Health Authority. I have also served as a Justice of the Peace for the last four years.

Now, of course, I assume a national role, not only as a Fiji First MP, but as the Assistant Minister for Education. I believe my own career as both a teacher and a member of various school and education boards has equipped me to make a valuable contribution, and I intend to do just that.

I am inspired by the vision that the honourable Prime Minister has laid out for excellence in education and giving every child in Fiji the same opportunity, not only to attend primary and secondary schools, but to pursue higher studies.

I share the views of others that our free education policy has been the Government's defining achievement. For the first time in our history, no Fijian child need to be left behind in acquiring the knowledge and skills to get on in life. For the first time in our history, parents such as my own do not have to suffer the anguish of telling their children, as I was told, that there is simply not enough money to achieve their dreams.

This is a remarkable change in the lives of tens of thousands of ordinary people and our job in the Ministry of Education is to deliver the programme to the best of our ability. The Government has outlined the vision of a clever country and the honourable Dr. Reddy and I are committed to working with our teachers and lecturers at schools and tertiary institutions to achieve it.

I am especially pleased to have heard the honourable Prime Minister calling for a bipartisan approach to any institution that benefits our young people. Education is not a preserve to any group or party. We all want the best for our children, irrespective of political allegiance, so I trust that over the next four years, we can all work together to achieve a better outcome in education and equip our young people for the better future that lies ahead.

Madam Speaker, never before have we had a better opportunity of moving our nation forward. It is a privilege for me to join this great crusade, and I close by asking for God's blessing on the young people of Fiji and on our beloved nation. Let us work together in making Fiji the way the world should be.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you and bahut dhanyavaad.

(Acclamation)

HON. CAPT. T.L. NATUVA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond gratefully to His Excellency the President's opening Address of this august Chambers.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election to lead this Parliament, as we embark on a new and permanent Fijian democracy – one that vests on the principle that all Fijians are equal. This legislative body is the institutional embodiment of that ideal.

Madam Speaker, in a democratic society, there is no greater honour than to be elected by the people as their representative in this Parliament. Likewise, there can be no greater responsibility than to represent all the people at this pivotal time in our history. The Fijian people expect much from us because that is their right. The world is watching us, as we have seen, and it is up to us, the elected representatives, to show that we can unite this country, even while we debate and disagree. In the end, if all the people believe that their voices will be equally heard, their views and interests considered equally and their rights as Fijians respected equally, we will be a united nation.

It is with humble pride that I take my place in this Chamber as a son of a poor farmer from Naitasiri, who has climbed through the ranks of the Military, and has now been given one of the most

important tasks in the new Government. My father was from Navuso in Naitasiri, and my mother was from Tokalau, Kabara, Lau. I was raised in Waibau, Naitasiri, and where I still live today with three of my brothers. Although we were poor, my mother was able to supplement my father's earnings from our farm by selling handicrafts. In this way, my parents were able to scrape together the fees that was needed to send us to school.

I attended Sawani Village School and Lelean Memorial School before I joined the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in 1976. So, I am acutely aware of how important my Government's education revolution has been in transforming the lives of ordinary Fijians. As so many of you will agree, it is the best thing we could have done as a government and nation to improve the lives of the people.

Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge and thank my family, especially my wife Mereani and four children, for the support they gave me. They always stood by me first, throughout my Military career of 38 years and now, through the Election campaign that has brought me here.

I also want to thank the honourable Prime Minister, Rear Admiral (Ret) Bainimarama, for guiding me during my time in the Military. With his endorsement as Commander, I was appointed Contingent Commander of the 1FIR in Lebanon, served with the 3FIR in Sinai; Contingent Commander in East Timor and Iraq; Chief of Staff of the United Nations and Interim Forces in Lebanon and Military Adviser to the United Nations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Honourable Prime Minister, I thank you, Sir.

The exposure to these overseas deployments, especially with the United Nations in a number of volatile countries where the orders of the day is unpredictable and decisions have to be immediate, precise and accurate; have modelled me into who I am today. It also prepared me to lead the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities (a government ministry) in the last seven years.

Madam Speaker, I was truly inspired by the honourable Prime Minister's maiden speech in which he explained the patriotic motives we all had in the Military when we assumed control of the country in 2006. We did not do it for ourselves, we did it to protect the unity of the nation, and like the honourable Prime Minister, I believe that history will eventually judge us favourably of having had the courage to act.

I also wish to thank those citizens of Fiji who voted for me. It has been a great honour to serve our nation in the past, and it is even greater honour to be entrusted with being of the Government to take us forward.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to thank the people of Naitasiri, Tailevu and the whole of Fiji who had the confidence in voting me into Parliament. I would also like to have a special mention of the Tikina Naitasiri-e-Ra; Tikina of Vuna; Tikina of Lomaivuna; Tikina Rara; Tikina Nabobuco; Tikina Mua- i-Ra; Tikina Nawaidina and Tikina Viria; and the farmers from Waibau.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President, in his speech when opening this Parliament, stressed that we, as Members of Parliament, are in a unique position as selected representatives for the people to truly make a difference over the next four years. At the outset, I would like to simply state that it is my intention, in line with the aims and objectives of this Government, to make a difference and to make the next four years count.

Madam Speaker, I would like to outline what I see as my role in this Parliament. I will focus primarily on the ministerial assignment that the honourable Prime Minister has entrusted with as the Minister for Immigration, National Security and Defence.

Madam Speaker, our national security landscape is currently stable and firmly under control, and we are determined as a government, to keep it that way. We will not tolerate any attempt to disrupt our new democracy and that the will of the people. So, I want to assure the nation that law and order will be maintained and we will have zero tolerance for any disturbance or disruptions.

When the honourable Prime Minister said recently that people can sleep soundly on their beds at night without need for fear, he meant it. The work of the Police backed by the Military, is to make sure we deliver the promise. Our duty remains to protect every Fijian – our infrastructures, values, sovereignty and our economy on which the prosperity of everyone depends.

The global security environment is dynamic and constantly changing. With the diverse range of threats that are on our horizon, our national security sector needs to be agile, flexible and adaptable to mitigate whatever threats they come our way and defeat them if necessary. To this end, we are strengthening our capability across the board, including our intelligence.

Madam Speaker, it is accepted that security is the platform for development. Therefore, the maintenance of stability and meeting our international security and defence obligations will be the overarching requirement.

Over the next four years, I intend to ensure that all the arms of the National Security Sector are made more efficient and effective by instituting a reform programme that will ensure the necessary democratic controls and civilian oversight equated with our new democracy is clearly established and respected.

My aim is to increase the capabilities and capacities of the two disciplined services. This will allow them to effectively and efficiently deliver to the expectation of Government and our people. I also intend to strengthen the role of my Ministry to properly co-ordinate the activities of the national security machinery through the direction and mandate of the National Security Council.

Madam Speaker, I also aim to ensure that we take full advantage of our corporate technologies to improve planning and increase efficiencies. This will ensure that our forces can operate together, communicate with each other, share information and co-ordinate their efforts. Inter-operability is the goal of security forces around the world in small and large countries and Fiji should not be different.

Madam Speaker, a firm policy base is required to achieve what I have outlined. For this, I have already put into motion the formulation of the following policy documents - National Security Policy, Defence White Paper and a Police White Paper. These strategic policies will basically outline the strategic objectives and requirements in terms of capability, capacity development and financing for the national security sector for the next four years. I aim to have these documents developed concurrently and as quickly as possible to ensure that where we are heading in terms of law and order, defence and national security are clearly understood by our people. National security institutions that are firmly under control and direction of elected authority are the bedrock of a democracy.

A democracy needs security and order. A democracy must be defended against both internal and external threats. A democracy must enforce its laws equally with regard to all citizens. A democracy must count on its armed institutions to operate within the law and in defence not just of the national territory, but of our national values, which are enshrined in our Constitution and in our laws.

Madam Speaker, more specifically, these are some of the improvements I intend to pursue over the next four years.

For the Fiji Police Force, I intend to pursue institutional reform and revitalisation to ensure that the Force is properly mandated and prepared to deliver safety and security of our people. I intend to continue the review and reform of the Police Act to align it to current operational requirements. The implementation of the last Job Evaluation Exercise for the Police will also be a priority. I also aim to ensure that proper planning, capability development and capacity building are encouraged throughout all levels and ranks of the Fiji Police Force to ensure that we serve the people better.

Madam Speaker, in relation to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, I intend to ensure that they have the necessary capabilities and support to continue maintain and even build our peacekeeping footprints across the globe. I also intend to develop the Blackrock Project as regional peacekeeping training centre to harness our expertise in the field of peacekeeping and to share our experiences with our partners. I also intend to pursue training across all ranks to further build greater professionalism. I will also focus intently on developing our maritime surveillance and defence capabilities. We are an island nation, and the Pacific Ocean is our border. We cannot ignore it, we must make it secure for the sake of our future generations.

Madam Speaker, of primary concern as well is the Department of Immigration, I intend to ensure that all policies, systems and processes are reviewed and improved to enhance the effectiveness of their service delivery. I intend to ensure that the Department is provided with proper infrastructure and capabilities to improve our border security measures. I will also seek to enhance their skills and knowledge through exposure to international best practices and training. This will be done with the aim of implementing border controls and security measures that are responsive and adapted to meet the growing challenges we face, including transnational crimes and people trafficking. The ultimate goal is reducing the porosity of our borders.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Immigration, National Security and Defence needs to be strengthened. In order to properly play a co-ordination role for the national security, law and order effort, I intend to ensure a new strategic plan with prioritised actions and timelines is in place to strengthen existing mechanisms and build capacity and capability to meet current and emerging challenges. I also propose to systematically review all existing bilateral and multilateral defence and security agreements, taking into account our foreign policy stance.

Madam Speaker, I believe that our term in Parliament will be challenging yet rewarding due the great things which we can achieve together. It is my earnest request that we, as honourable Members of this Parliament, deliberate on issues in an objective and selfless manner.

I believe, Madam Speaker, that we must heed His Excellency the President's call to the Members of this House to rise above party politics, to rise above petty personal issues and make our term count. We need to put our nation before ourselves and I pledge to do that over the next four years as we work together to move Fiji forward. *Vinaka vakalevu, dhaniyavaad* and thank you.

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.47 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.15 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before calling the next speaker, and with the agreement of Parliament, I propose that we proceed with the remaining speakers on the list from today before breaking for lunch, when the House will adjourn until Thursday, 15th October at 9.30 a.m.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE MOTION TO THANK
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I congratulate you, as I stand and beg your leave to make my contribution.

Firstly, I wish to make a comment on the *ebola* virus. It has come to my notice that this dreadful disease has been confirmed to have reached Spain and the United States of America (USA) and I believe, as I urge the Government to make a statement through the Ministry of Health of some assurance, or the measures that are there to stop this dreadful disease from coming to Fiji.

I also wish to make a comment on the case of Josefa Bilitaki. This case has caused some uneasiness in the population and the question of whether the Military is still involved. We need an assurance, and I urge the Government to give a statement through the relevant Ministry of an assurance to tell us whether or not the Military was involved. If so, the names of those that were involved and who gave the orders. Also, if so, what disciplinary measures are being made?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, coming here on the very first day of Parliament, the feeling that I had was that of anger and animosity towards the Members on the other side of the House, and rightly so because for the first time, I am coming face to face with the members of a government I hold responsible for suppressing the rights of the native people of this country. I despise them, because indigenous group right touches on the very essence of my cultural identity.

But since then, I have sat down to relate to some of them. Many of them are my very close colleagues, however, we have different political beliefs, and I respect that. And I now apologise if at times, after this or even during this speech, I will sound harsh and critical. The reason for that is because the issues that I will be raising are important and critical to me and to the nation and I get emotional at times every time I raise it.

Now, here today in this Chamber, after acquainting myself with the Members from the other side, and especially after listening to the maiden speech of the honourable Prime Minister, I can see that there is hope and goodwill and I want to harvest and cultivate that atmosphere to ask for dialogue on the things that I hold dear namely, the suppression of the rights of the indigenous people of this country.

Already I have heard the honourable Prime Minister made three offers of cooperation to the opposition side of the House. Once, in his speech at the UN in New York, another for the Budget meeting and yet another in his maiden speech.

Madam Speaker, I will take the honourable Prime Minister at his words that he is keen to cooperate, so please to the other side of the House, I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the issues and concerns that I have with you and the Cabinet.

Madam Speaker, before I move on, there are people that I wish to remember to thank first. I wish to remember firstly, all who have lost their lives, their employment, their property and their dignity and all those who were abused of their basic human rights as a result of the 1987, 2000 and 2006 *coups*.

I remember especially those who have died from both sides of the divide, from the Military, from the Police, from the civilians, from either side and from those are for and those are against. These people do not have to die and the result are the consequence, the responsibility rest on us all as a community. I intend to name them now; to Corporal Raj Kumar, Filipino Seavula, Private Rokosirinavosa and Weleilakeba, I remember you. Private Veilewai, Corporal Rawaileba and Rokosaqa, I will remember you and pray for your families. Private Bainimoli, Davui and Waseroma, I will remember you and I will pray for your families. Private Kalounivale, Kolinio Tabua and Vilikesa Soko, I remember you and I will pray for your families. Josefa Baleiloa, Josua Ralulu and Ben Wise, I remember you and I will pray for your families. Alivereti Nimacere, Tevita Malasabe, Nimilote Verebasaga and Sakiusa Rabaka, I remember you and I will pray for your families and any other families who have lost loved ones that I may not be aware. And like the honourable Leader of the Opposition, I too pledge to the families that I will not rest until they receive justice for the loss and sufferings. For so long as one of the families in Fiji is denied justice, none of us can be sure to receive.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable , may I just remind you the importance of the relevance that Members of Parliament respond to His Excellency's Address.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Madam.

Having said that Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the statement by the honourable Prime Minister that what he did in 2006 was necessary. But I do not agree that it was a revolution as some of these Members are saying, nor do I agree with it, or with the means he resolved it. To me, as a lawyer and as a law abiding citizen, we should call it what it was. It was an act of treason, plain and simple, regardless in whatever form and for whatever reason, it was done. It was illegal and it was the highest form of a criminal offence that George Speight was punishable by death in this country.

However, we are people of goodwill here in this country. We can forgive and no doubt, we will all forget. But the wrongdoers must at first acknowledge that what they did was unlawful and they must accept responsibility for their wrong doing, just as every other citizens is expected to do if they commit a crime against the law. The truth, Madam Speaker, must be told so that we can understand why things were done and who did it. Justice cannot take time out when it suits it and re-engage in another form and another crime. It must be prevail at all times in all situations and justice must serve with all, and not just a few.

Madam Speaker, there are people that I wish to thank and first and foremost, I wish to thank my loving and faithful wife – Mili, my children Tema, Amosi, Pau, Sofaia and Aisake, and my grandchildren – Niko and Aisake.

I also thank Gilbert, my campaign manager, Paula – my area manager for Viti Levu and all the villagers and all poll agents from Dawara to Wainigadru to Buca and Tukavesi.

I thank most sincerely the heads of the Vanua of Wailevu, Savusavu, Navatu, Koroalau, Vaturova, Saqani, Tawake and Natewa. I thank Mr. and Mrs. Setareki Savu, CBM Adelaide, Kimo and Ili and FDFM, U.S.

I thank my prayer group members of Our Lady of Fatima of Nausori Parish, especially the mothers of the prayer group and their children who have supported me.

I thank my elderly parents who are still alive and who are in their 80s. I remember also my late brothers, Poasa and Aisake, I mention you here by names because I love and still miss you.

Now I wish to reply to His Excellency's speech. I want to say at the outset that I do not think that the 2013 Constitution is the Constitution of this country - not yet in any way and let me explain my reasons. I know and I accept that we are now following this document as a guideline to run this government. I know and I accept that we have used it to hold the General Elections, as I know that we are all here in this Parliament because of it. But so far as I know the laws, this is an interim measure only that we are now using in our metamorphosis as we evolve ourselves to achieve true democracy because by its very definition, the term constitution as derived from the *latin* word "*constitutio*" which means the peoples' will.

The question I ask Madam Speaker is, is the 2013 Constitution the peoples' will? The straight answer is that, it is not and this has been imposed on us. That is the reason why it is imperfect. It is a means only we are using in the interim stage to move towards our achieving the perfect someday, and I hope sooner and not later. But take nothing away from those who have laboured hard and provided this Constitution for us and I acknowledge their work. However, the fact is, true democracy will only be achieved by a Constitution that contains the following essential elements:

- 1) It is the common will of the population;
- 2) it guarantees the rights of all citizens, and by that I mean, individual fundamental rights, indigenous group rights, minority rights, worker's rights, women's rights and all the other rights that are now established by UN Convention;
- 3) it provides within its mechanism that provides a clear separation of power; and
- 4) it must also provide within it a provision that guarantees accountability, transparencies and good governance.

Madam Speaker, I will be so bold as to say that the sooner we convene a commission to look into and extract from all previous documents, the Constitution, the good they have in them, combining them all into one that we all agree with...

HON. OPPOSITION. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... containing those essential elements, the better it will be for us. Not doing so, Madam Speaker, will be an invitation for another *coup* because we have shown by the very way that we have been voting since 1987, that a *coup* is a legitimate way to change things.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (Ret) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, we better watch out for this man, he is threatening....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A Point of Order, Ma'am.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please be more responsible with the statements you are making, so that you are not making threats.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I stand also on a Point of Order that a person who is on his feet, is not entitled to be interjected, at this stage. That is my privilege.

HON. OPPOSITION. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

MADAM SPEAKER.- You may carry on, honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I now wish to address this House on the intentional removal from this Constitution of the entrenched provisions of the group rights of native Fijians. I want to focus also on the suppression of indigenous rights in the last eight years.

These were part of a clear plan and motive by this Government based on its so-called Sunset Clause that called for mainstreaming of Native Fijians by the suppression and removal of all manifestation of their cultural identity in the name of equal citizenry. These were reflected in the 17 Decrees passed in the last eight years for those very purposes. They are as follows:

- 1) The Fijian Affairs (Great Council of Chiefs) Regulations 2007, that suspended the GCC;
- 2) The Fijian Affairs (Great Council of Chiefs) Regulations of 2008, that terminated the 1993 GCC Regulation to bring it under the complete power and authority and dominance of Government;
- 3) The Fijian Affairs (Provincial Council) (Amendment) Regulation 2008, that terminated the attendance at Provincial Councils of educated urban Fijians, iTaukei;
- 4) The Fijians Trust Fund (Amendment) Decree No. 38 of 2009 that brought the fund completely under the authority and control of the Government;
- 5) The Native Land Trust (Amendment) Decree No. 31 of 2009, that removed from the native indigenous population of this country totally control of their native land;
- 6) The Native Land Trust Regulation (Amendment) 2010, that terminated the chief's share of royalty;
- 7) Mahogany Industry Development Decree 2010 (Decree No. 16 of 2010), that established a new Government board to administer mahogany leases;
- 8) The Regulation of Surfing Areas Decree No. 35 of 2010, that removed the right of iTaukei from Surfing area;
- 9) The Fijian Affairs (Amendment) Decree No. 31 of 2010, that took away "Fijian" as their name, that was replaced by "iTaukei".
- 10) The Native Land Trust (Amendment) Decree No. 32 of 2010, that removed the President as chiefly and Landowner representative and Chairman of TLTB board and replaced by Government alone;
- 11) The Land use Decree No. 36 of 2010 that give power to Government authority to designate any native land to the land bank;

- 12) The Native Land Trust Act (Amendment) Decree No. 20 of 2010 that terminated the GCC authority over extinct *mataqali* land.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, may I interject, as I had mentioned earlier, there is irrelevance of your statements to His Excellency's Address, and also under Standing Order 67, you may be terminated for irrelevance of your statement to the issue at hand.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Very well, Madam Speaker, I will sum it up.

My answer to that, Madam Speaker, is that, this is relevant because it goes to the very heart of what His Excellency had addressed us on; Unity. We cannot achieve unity until the concerns of every group of citizens of this country is properly addressed.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- My point Madam Speaker, is that, the 17 Decrees are totally in breach of Fiji's obligation under the International Labour Organisation Convention 169 that Fiji ratified in 1998, and by that, it undertook to protect and maintain customary institutions, protect and maintain the independence, or in spite of that.

I end by saying, Madam Speaker, that in 2012, the *Marama Bale Roko Tui Dreketi*, and *Turaga Bale Tui Cakau* asked me to take these very same concerns to the Human Rights Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva. This is what they say when the Fiji representative was asked, why did it pass all these Decrees, because they are in breach of our indigenous rights? The answer was; "Fiji does not recognise indigenous rights because they are the majority". To which they answered, and I quote:

"What about Bolivia and Guatemala?" and they said, "The passing of policies and laws to dismantle customary institution, to take away their name and take away the control of their land are acts of discrimination. Fiji should recognise native Fijian Group Rights, as well as recognise the rights of other communities and individual rights and make sure that none topples the other".

So, you should do a balancing act, you do not dismantle or remove them.

In their concluding remarks, (if you want to see this, you can google it), the UN Human Rights Committee said and I quote:

"...it is however concerned by reports of insufficient consultation with and participation of indigenous people as regards issues affecting them. The Committee notes the dissolution of the GCC without prior consultation. The Committee reaffirms the importance of securing the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous Fijians regarding their permanent rights as a group. It urges the State party to enhance appropriate mechanisms for effective consultation with indigenous people around all policies affecting their identity, ways of living and resources, in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169 (1991)".

That is not me, Madam Speaker. That is from them.

Madam Speaker, may I conclude by thanking the honourable Prime Minister on the offer he has made to us, on this side of the Chambers for co-operation. I submit the 17 Decrees and generally the suppression of indigenous rights of native Fijians is a good issue for dialogue. And if the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Attorney-General, and the honourable Tikoduadua or any other honourable Members from the opposite side of the Chambers, if one of these days you find me knocking at your door step, begging for dialogue on these issues, I ask you all most humbly, to please do not close your doors on me. *Vinaka!*

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

(Acclamation)

HON S. PATEL.- The honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Ministers, honourable Members of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament.

First of all, I wish to congratulate you Madam Speaker, for accepting this high office and creating history by being the first woman in Fiji to be elected in this prestigious position. Your previous experience and various roles will benefit all of us here.

Madam Speaker, this is one of the examples of FijiFirst vision, of recognising the status of women in our society. I am confident that your professional conduct and guidance will add to the honour and decorum to this august House.

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate honourable Ruveni Nadalo for accepting the position of the Deputy Speaker of the House. Honourable Nadalo has huge experience in managing public affairs.

Madam Speaker, on 7th October, we were blessed by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji with the opening of this new Parliament after a lapse of eight years and he quoted the launch of our new democracy. We were all reminded to work together and advance the national interest.

I would like to congratulate our honourable Prime Minister for his leadership during the General Elections. His own votes is more than the total votes of the opposition and despite all the negativities thrown at him during the General Elections, he has, in his maiden speech, showed his willingness to work with the opposition and to move this country forward. He is a great leader and I am fortunate to be part of his team FijiFirst.

I will take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who had faith in me and had voted for me, especially the people of my hometown Nadi. I hope my contribution over the next four years will reward their faith.

I would also like to acknowledge my late father Mahijhi Bhai and my late cousins Mr Ravindra Patel and Kanti Patel who are no longer here, but they would be very proud of me standing here today and delivering my speech.

I would like to thank my family members, my brother Mahend and Vinod for their support in the lead up to the election. I am very fortunate to have them. My wife Ripal for her understanding and emotions during the campaign, my 14 year old daughter Bhumika, who is growing very quickly and I still remember holding her in my arms, when she was born in Lautoka Hospital. My younger 12

year old daughter Shruti, who was helping me in campaigning and gave me inspiration even as a child. My nephew Krupesh who was there all the time during my campaign.

I would also like to sincerely thank Tui Nadi for his blessings before I started my election campaign, Mr Abbas Ali and Gary Raniga.

Also I would like to thank Mr Bijai Prasad who was my campaign manager. He worked tirelessly to a well-planned election campaign, his experience together with a network of volunteers around Nadi, helped me a lot.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my volunteers who sacrificed their time to make sure I won. Without you, I would not be here. Also I would like to thank all those who supported me, I will do my best to make you all proud of me. There are many people who worked late nights to make sure that I did well and I would like to simply say thank you and not forgetting all my friends who were there with me all the time.

Madam Speaker, I will now give a short introduction of my upbringing and the route to this august House. My father Mahijibhai Patel who was a farmer in India came to Fiji in 1938. With no proper education and financial background, he worked with his brother Shankarbai Patel where he gained knowledge about doing small business by selling potatoes and onions. He went back to India and got married to my mother Shanta Ben in 1949 and came back to Fiji later and he started a general merchant store in the heart of Nadi in the early 1950s.

My parents lived at the back of the shop. We have six sisters and four brothers in our family. Although my parents had little education, they ensured that all their children received the education at the time. They worked night and day to make sure all our ends are met.

My primary education began in Nadi Sangam School followed with secondary school Form 3 – 6 in Nadi College. I would like to acknowledge Dr Saukat Ali Sayas whose contribution towards education has helped a lot of people in Nadi.

I did my Form Seven education at Swami Vivekananda College. I would like to remind honourable Members that Swami Vivenkanda College has also produced leaders. The ability to produce leaders is not the exclusivity of only a few select schools.

My parents kept a close watch on my education and my religious upbringing. I would like to pay my special tribute to the late Swami Damodaran Nandaji of Rama Krishna Mission in Nadi, who taught me a lot about religious beliefs and to respect other religions.

After completing my secondary education, I went to Canberra where I obtained a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Management Science at the University of Canberra. At that time, my father had passed away in 1992 so I decided to return to Fiji to help my father's business together with my brother. The business grew from a small single counter to lock, cash and imported documents to a large hardware in Nadi.

Madam Speaker, besides being a partner in my company, I took part in community welfare projects and sports. My political career started when I decided to join local politics in October 1999. I joined the National Federation Party and contested the Nadi Municipal elections. We won and I became a town councillor. It was during this time I realised how important your decision will have on people's lives.

In 2005, I served as the Mayor of Nadi and that year, Nadi Town Council produced a surplus budget of over \$1million. I gained a lot of experience during that term as one third of the members were from the opposition and we all worked together for the betterment of Nadi.

Interestingly, in 2004, I was also tipped to be the mayor, but I did not, because three of our members from the National Federation Party crossed the floor and joined the Fiji Labour Party.

(Laughter)

The switching of sides for political gain is in fact, the characteristics of these two parties. Needless to say, the party hierarchy did not take any action but after a year, they came back and that is why I became the mayor in 2005. This incident brought me the point that many politicians are not principally-based. I am a member and a past president of Nadi Rotary Club, presently I am the chairman of the board of Nadi College and president of the Fiji Education Society in Nadi.

Madam Speaker, I have been a member of the National Federation Party until 2007 that once comprised mainly of indo Fijians. When I was approached by the Honourable Minister Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to join FijiFirst Party and be part of moving the country forward I had little or no choice to join. I say I had no choice because it was not difficult to decide. Here was a party that looked after the entire cross section of the community that was transparent in its operation, guaranteed equal citizenry, respected all religion, attracted investment, offered stability and jobs and I decided to join FijiFirst.

Madam Speaker, I did not have to wait too long, our Prime Minister along with our hardworking Attorney General have given us everything the country needed and more. Improvements to the infrastructure, free education, much improved welfare system, equal distribution of lease money to all members of the landowning units and VAT-free essential food items, are only a few to be mentioned.

The honourable Prime Minister and the honourable and learned Attorney-General have repeatedly assured us that there are measures in place to give this nation the Singapore outlook. It may not happen overnight, but with proper forward planning and perseverance, we can get there. We have a leader who has been tested and the Attorney-General - a very practical unit.

Madam Speaker, we have to put our heads together and give our full co-operation to all the Ministers and Assistant Ministers to make that dream a reality.

The Government has done a lot of improvements in Nadi. The most noticeable one is the extension of the Nadi Market where women who used to bring vegetables and root crops from the interior had to spend nights sleeping on the footpath of Nadi Town. During rainy weather, they would wrap themselves with plastic to protect themselves from getting wet. I was so proud to witness and be part of the opening of the new accommodation for the women with the best facility. The days of sleeping on the footpath are gone. It is these types of small improvements that we bring in people's lives, make us proud Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the people of Nadi are resilient. The reason I say this is because, despite going through many cyclones, flooding, drought, we continued to be part of our country's major revenue generator. Nadi controls the tourism industry, and also as a major producer in the sugar belt. The business community has so many times lost all their stock during the floods and families lost everything during cyclones but still, we continued to build the nation. I would like to request honourable Ministers to pay a special attention on this.

Madam Speaker, I would like to use a quote from the late A.D. Patel where he said, and I quote:

“You cannot block the progress of people indefinitely. Everything changes, things will need to change in this country and it will be the people who have visions, who will have imagination to see that in the modern world, only those who can survive will have the ability to modernize.”

Madam Speaker, we as political leaders, are here to offer our fellow Fijians the hope of a better life for them and their future generation. We will all have to work together in achieving that dream. A lot needs to be done. We cannot use the events in our history to stop our progress for the future. With careful planning where every aspect of our country's unique culture is maintained, we should also embrace the future.

At the same time, we need to be careful about the development and the effects it will have on our environment. Fiji, as we all know, is known for its beautiful people and its beautiful beaches, amongst the best in the world. With development will come environmental issues. We need to be very careful with our environment and ensure that it is not disturbed for small profits.

We have to look at our children's future as well. We will need to set up a direction for our future and from that, we can work back and work out specific policies. Let us set up the direction and then tackle the challenges in front of us. The world around us is changing rapidly, and we need to keep up with that pace or we will be left behind.

Madam Speaker, the greatest opportunity any parent and any society can give the next generation is education. With our Government's free education policy, there is no discrimination amongst the rich and the poor. It is the responsibility of every parent to make sure their children gets educated. Spending time with your children and checking their homework and school work, is the job of every parent. Spending quality time and teaching them values will see progress in our children, and our nation.

I would like to end with this quote from Swami Vivekananda, and I quote:

“Men must have education. They speak of democracy, of equality of all men, these days. But how will a man know he is equal with all? He must have a strong brain, a clear mind free from nonsensical ideas; he must pierce through the mass of superstitions encrusting his mind to the pure truth that is in his inner most self. Then he will know that all perfections, all powers are already within himself that these have not to be given to him by others. When he realises this, he comes free that moment, he achieves equality. He also realises that everyone else is equally as perfect as he, and he does not have to exercise any power, physical, mental or moral over his brother men. He abandons the idea that there was ever any man who was lower than himself. Then he can talk of equality; not until then.”

Madam Speaker, God bless Fiji, *vinaka, Jai Shree Krishna.*

(Acclamation)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament; good morning, *bula, Ram Ram.*

Madam Speaker, I am honoured and pleased to be part of this august Chambers as a Member of Parliament. Firstly, let me congratulate you on your appointment as the first female Speaker of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I must also thank the honourable Prime Minister, together with the honourable and learned Attorney-General for allowing me to be part of the FijiFirst team to fight the General Elections.

I also thank the honourable Minister for Education for his encouragement.

I would also like to thank the Marama na Tui Ba; *Turaga na Tui Naloto*; villagers of Toge, Balevuto, Vatawai, Tabataba, Rara, Nanuku, Nalotawa, Nailaga, Koroqaqa, Votua, Nawaqarua, Natutu; settlements of Maururu, Naitamusu, Nakavika, Liganasasa, Cirisobu; all farmers and cane cutters; families and friends around Fiji and abroad.

I would like to convey special thanks to my wife and children for their support, and to Mr. Kamlesh and the team of Nukuloa, Ba; as well as the *Turaga ni Yavusa Nasolo* of Nailaga Village.

I wish to thank my parents and siblings who live in Canada. All my family members who live overseas have been meeting my living expenses, whilst I have been carrying out community work for the past 22 years. They also contribute to the many community projects I have been involved in.

Madam Speaker, and the honourable Prime Minister has done a lot for all Fijians in our country in the past seven to eight years, which I strongly feel will continue and assist the society at large in different aspects. I only urge Government to continue developments which will reduce urban drift, reduce crime rate and lessen community dependence on Government assistance such as welfare, and lead to an increase in agricultural development.

We, in Government, will work to decentralise Government services to rural areas. One such example through the Rural Development Programme is Nukuloa which is 15 kilometres in the interior of Ba. Work to have services in this area has already commenced. We already have a police post, a health centre, a mortuary, a primary and a secondary school, a vocational centre, a government telecentre, a new bridge, tarsealed roads and improved clean and drinkable water system. More Government departments will be built in this area, including a shopping mall.

Madam Speaker, 15 families have returned to this area, and the value of the land including *itaukei* land has increased substantially. It is because of such developments, we can stop the rural-urban drift. It is because of such developments that *itaukei* landowners will benefit and become cash-rich and true landlords. I thank the honourable Prime Minister for such initiatives.

Madam Speaker, I note that since the General Elections, individuals within the sugarcane industry, including FSC who are, because of their political bias, try to slow things down. I also note that some rural advisory councillors and local authority board members are doing the same or sabotaging development efforts because of their political prejudice.

I urge all people who hold such public offices and in positions in the sugarcane industry to not damage the industry or impede development for their own selfish and political gain and point making. That is not true patriots. One must rise above petty politics and self-interests. In the same way, I urge Members of this august Chamber, not to encourage such people. We would be abdicating our responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, with respect to His Excellency the President, I fully support his views during his speech, which the community at large has also welcomed and I also assure you, together with all Members of Parliament that I will continue to contribute positively in the days to come in Chamber, so that our nation moves forward as expected by all Fijians.

(Acclamation)

HON. DR B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I join honourable Members of Parliament in thanking His Excellency our President for his most gracious speech.

On behalf of the National Federation Party (NFP), I also thank him for setting the tone of this Parliament by reminding us of the responsibility that Government and the Opposition share in charting the next phase of our history.

Madam Speaker, our people have spoken. They have elected their government for the next four years. We wish the honourable Prime Minister, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama and his Government well for the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I join the whole country in congratulating you on your election as our Speaker. As the first woman Speaker of this Parliament, your appointment will also serve as an inspiration to women across the country, to reach for greater heights.

I also extend the NFP's congratulations to the *Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi*, honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, as the Leader of the Opposition, following on from the late Mrs Irene Jai Narayan of the National Federation Party as Deputy Opposition Leader, again a first for women in our country.

I also congratulate the Secretary General of Parliament, Mrs. Viniana Namosimalua, her Deputy and all the honourable women Members of Parliament.

Further, I congratulate honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo on her appointment as the President of the oldest political party in the South Pacific, the National Federation Party.

Madam Speaker, I extend our thanks to both benches in sending such a strong signal towards empowerment of women. Our country will move forward only if women and men work together honestly and equally.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- We are hopeful that this rare line up of talent will ensure that all Government programmes and laws are given detailed scrutiny for their positive impact on women and girls.

The NFP will work with you in ensuring that there is a renewed national urgency in dealing with issues that affect women, especially ranging from their serious under-representation at top levels of the Civil Service, to the growing incidence of domestic violence, to the painful reality of extreme poverty, in which tens of thousands of women currently live in.

After eight years, Parliamentary democracy has returned to Fiji. It is fitting that the restoration of parliamentary democracy coincides with a period of festivity – having just celebrated *Eid* and heading to celebrate *Diwali*. Our men, so ably led by Osea Kolinisau have already given the nation an

early Christmas cheer. We have much to celebrate. We do have much to celebrate in our return to Parliamentary democracy.

Madam Speaker, to those who have had the privilege to be elected to this Parliament, let me say, “we have two obligations at the core of our role as Members of Parliament. First, we have to make our democracy work; and second, we have to make our democracy work for our people”.

Madam Speaker, what do I mean by that? To make our democracy work, we need to ensure that our citizens and their organisations are able to freely comment, support and when needed, criticise policies and programmes being debated by this House. They need to know that our media will amplify their voices and ensure that these are directly heard by us. This way we will know how citizens feel about and experience government policies and programmes. Our democracy will grow from this new openness.

Second, we need to make our democracy work for our people. The honourable Prime Minister called for our support to his programme for Government. We will extend that support. In extending that support, we will hold the honourable Prime Minister to his own words.

The honourable Prime Minister has promised a better future for our youth. We will ask that he show to this House how:

- a) his programmes will impact on creating jobs for our young; and
- b) his programmes will contribute to increasing their incomes when in employment.

And through this constructive exchange, honourable Prime Minister, we expect that the Government's programme will become sharper and more impactful.

Madam Speaker, the composition of our Parliament shows that while this House represents our return to Parliamentary democracy, our democracy remains work in progress. The fact that a vast majority of Members of Parliament in both Government and in Opposition benches are *iTaukei*, draws attention to the fact that institutions, laws and programmes that affect *iTaukei* communities in specific ways need to be reviewed and consensus built around some of these issues.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- As a party, the NFP fought the General Elections on specific issues, The Team NFP had 49 men and women of integrity, honesty and qualified to serve the people of Fiji . We did not campaign along racial and religious lines, or promote lies and deceit. We thank our members, supporters and well-wishers for placing their trust in us.

Madam Speaker, we did not win any seats in the 1999 and 2006 General Elections. It is therefore, a matter of some pride that the NFP is back in Parliament with three seats.

We were here in this fine building during the Legislative Council era, led by the late A.D. Patel in the 1960s, then the NFP raised the issue of the need for a pension institution for our workers. We were here, represented by the late Siddiq Koya when we extended our support to transition to full Independence. We were here under the leadership of now retired international jurist Justice Jai Ram Reddy, when the country made considerable progress economically and socially in the 1970s and early 1980s. We were here when that progress was painfully derailed by the start of the debilitating cycle of *coups*.

Madam Speaker, we are here today to help put those last 27 years of suffering behind us, heal our nation and move onto find our greatness and our rightful place as the leader of the South Pacific. We had, like other parties contested to form government. We have fallen short, but this takes nothing away from the heroic effort led by the greatest team of volunteers in the country – the Team NFP. A heartfelt thanks to them.

We are represented by three Members of Parliament today. Their election speaks of the resilience of the principles of fairness, equality and social justice. These principles have defined the National Federation Party inside this House, and outside for 51 years of its existence.

Madam Speaker, where necessary, we will criticise Government's policies. When we do, it will not be for the sake of doing so, but because we, in our considered view, are able to provide credible alternatives.

Madam Speaker, I did not resign as Professor of Economics to pursue politics as a career. I joined politics with a deep conviction that through collective action and perseverance, we can change things in Fiji for the better however difficult the obstacles might be.

My upbringing has taught me the virtues of truth and righteousness. These values are highlighted especially during the *Diwali* festivities. However, I have also grown up realising that the way to truth and righteousness can be a tortuous route to doing good. Politics for me is extension of these values, through slow and deliberate collective actions on that path of truth and righteousness, we pursue and seek solutions to the great problems in our national life.

Madam Speaker, as tradition dictates, His Excellency the President outlined Government's policies for the ensuing year.

The high cost of living, the decline of the sugar industry, the crippling effects of the drought, rising unemployment, derogations in the Bill of Rights of the 2013 Constitution, regressive and draconian Decrees, a regulated media, the deteriorating health system and medical services are fundamental problems that can only be resolved through leadership, collective action and perseverance.

We have been sent to this august House to solve these problems. We have very little to celebrate in our parliamentary democracy:

- a) when a third of our people live in extreme poverty;
- b) poor mothers across our country have to wait for hours in Government hospitals for doctors to attend to their sick children; and
- c) for so long as a situation persists, where a worker employed at the minimum wage needs to work for five hours to earn enough to put one decent meal for his or her family.

No one Party, Madam Speaker, has the monopoly of ideas for fully resolving these social and economic problems, but we all share the shame that this brings to us as a nation. We will need perseverance, frank and open dialogue and a shared commitment on all sides to seek consensual solutions to these problems.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President alluded to genuine democracy and to the trust which has been placed by the people of Fiji in the honourable Members of this Parliament. The question that arises, Madam Speaker is, are we living and practicing genuine democracy? Have the Election and the re-opening of Parliament re-established checks and balances, and fair-play?

Madam Speaker, the continuation of some of the regressive decrees will render meaningless all talk of Fiji once again being a genuinely democratic nation. The Media Industry Development Authority Decree, the Essential (Employment) National Industries Decree, the Political Parties Decree must be repealed by Parliament because they curtail the rights of the media, ordinary workers, trade unionists and ultimately our people.

More specifically, in a real democracy, Madam Speaker, people must have the liberty to speak openly and candidly. In it, the Government of the day listens and the media exercises its role as the messenger, a watchdog of democracy, and as an independent institution, responsibly asserting a right to speak with its own voice, and not merely echoing the voice of Parliament or the executive government. Rather, it scrutinizes the consequences of actions and decisions of Parliament and government on ordinary people, while consciously representing the interests of the disadvantaged and downtrodden in society, and not just the powerful and wealthy or its owners and advertisers. Such freedom to scrutinize and make known to all, if available to Fiji's media, will ensure that the accountability and transparency called for by His Excellency the President in His Opening Address to Parliament will be guaranteed.

Madam Speaker, these Decrees were imposed without the participation of the aggrieved parties. Now is the chance to consult all our people directly through their elected representatives. There has to be consensus on what is the best and ideal legislation to benefit the entire nation. Consensus is a fundamental principle in a genuine democracy, and our former Prime Minister and President, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, described consensus as an "accord amongst the people involved" in 1996. He said, and I quote:

"We should realise and accept that consensus does not mean complete unanimity, desirable as that may be. It is perhaps best defined as an accord amongst the majority of the people involved and this is a most worthwhile and attainable objective".

Consensus building requires mutual respect for each other's views, abundance of goodwill, willingness to dialogue, capacity to listen patiently and building of mutual trust. Both the honourable Prime Minister, and honourable Leader of the Opposition spoke about the need to work together for the common good of all our people. The pre-requisite for working together is transparency and accountability.

As a start, Madam Speaker, the immediate tabling of the Auditor-General's Reports in Parliament for the last eight years will be a step...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear! Hear!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- ...towards creating trust and confidence in our democracy because this is what was promised to the people of Fiji by both the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General before the General Elections.

I also urge Government to introduce Bills for the enactment of the Accountability and Transparency Commission, and a Code of Conduct for public officers including Government and Members of Parliament.

The repeal or review of the draconian Decrees plus the introduction of Bills to enact legislation to promote accountability and transparency will lead to good governance and this must be done as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker, I had said during the course of the campaign that for our country to realise its full potential:

- 1) we need clarity about the direction of travel in rebuilding our country;
- 2) in rebuilding our country, we need a sense of urgency and pace; and
- 3) we need knowledge and human resources to achieve our goals.

In my journey from Dreketi to Labasa, to Suva, to the wider world and back in Fiji, I have followed these guidelines. I believe they are equally relevant in helping us rebuild our democracy and our economy.

In 2020, Madam Speaker, Fiji will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary as an independent country. We all have an opportunity to work had make sure that we have real achievements to celebrate in the 50th year of our existence as a free nation. Given our many wasted years, we have a lot of catching up to do. But, to get there, we have to avoid 'business as usual', Madam Speaker. A 'business as usual' would mean the continuation of, to some extent, fear and intimidation, inconsistent economic policies and monopolistic behaviour that stifles our creativity.

Madam Speaker, there is an alternative to this bleak future. With clarity about our vision, certainty about the reforms needed to realise that, with some luck and the grace of God, a future of great possibilities lies within our grasp.

Madam Speaker, allow me to commend the Government for two issues that His Excellency the President alluded to. First, is the issue of improving the quality of education that the honourable Minister for Education has already stated publicly. I would urge Government to proceed with great care given its importance for the future. The last Education Commission Report produced in 2000 is now 14 years old. I urge the Government to appoint another Education Commission to look at the entire education system afresh. Piecemeal and rushed reforms will not be helpful.

The second issue, Madam Speaker, is the plan to construct a state of the art tertiary care hospital as part of the FNU Medical School. This is a great initiative and I commend Government for it, and hope that work on it will start sooner than later.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Osea Kolinisau and his men have shown that we can beat the world in Sevens Rugby. Honourable Iliesa Delana has shown that he can out jump the world. Mr. Vijay Singh has shown that he can beat Tiger Woods and all other golfing greats of his generation. In commerce, our hotels feature amongst the best in the world. Fiji Water outperforms some of the top corporations in the world. These we can do. If we can do all these, surely we can aspire to, and match the best standards in the world in the quality and standard of education in our schools. To aspire to make our country great once more, we as leaders need to work with humility. We need to shed egos and prejudices, we need to embrace dialogue and a commitment to seek consensus as a way of solving the profound problems that are a blight on this great country.

Madam Speaker, this is a beautiful country. It must become great once again. It can once again become, "the way the world should be".

I wish all the honourable Members well. May God Bless Fiji!

(Acclamation)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Minister and fellow honourable Members of Parliament.

I begin my maiden speech today with a bible verse taken from the Book of *Exodus* which reads and I quote:

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. Worship no God but Me. Do not make for yourselves images of anything in Heaven or on earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws. Do not use my name for evil purposes, For I, the Lord your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.”

It is this biblical passage that propelled me on the political path I have chosen.

Madam Speaker. I grew up under the care of my late grandparents in my village of Serea, Naitasiri. From as early as I can remember, I was instilled with the belief that opportunity and freedom would come through education, personal responsibility and self- belief, that my destiny was largely in my own hands, how hard I studied and worked, the opportunities I took and how I dealt with people.

Like any ordinary citizen, I grew to believe that I was responsible for charting my own course. I was free to follow my dreams, make my own mistakes, take the consequences of my decisions and most importantly, learn from it. I have also learnt to rely on the Lord and acknowledge Him for wisdom and in all things.

As a newly elected Member of this august House, I commence by congratulating you, Madam Speaker, upon your appointment as the first female Speaker of the Fiji Parliament. Your ascension has created political history in Fiji. You join other female Speakers in the Pacific like the late Marguerite Nora Eikura Kitimira Story and honourable Niki Rattle, both from Cook Islands, to name a few.

You have all established great grounds for women in politics in Fiji and the Pacific. I imagine you, Madam Speaker, to be an inspiration to women and girls in this part of the globe. I wish you God's guidance for your unenviable task in your tenure as Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the resumption of Parliament has come after almost eight long years following the political *coup* in December 2006. It is nevertheless here, and therefore I acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister for delivering on his promise to allow for national Elections to occur in September 2014. This has given back power to the people at long last.

Madam Speaker, my journey here commenced after years of having served as an executive officer in both the private and public sectors. My desire to become a Member of this august House, apart from wanting to serve our people to make a positive difference in their lives, is also intended to ensure I become a voice to the many civilians who may have, due to no fault of their own, lost their jobs, lost their families, lost their source of inspiration and lost their source of regular income.

There are a number of hard working professionals we have in Fiji today who continue to be ostracized for some reason that remains vague. These individuals have much to give back to the nation. We are poorer as a people if we continue to keep them in their current perils, at the prime of their lives and without jobs. I give myself as an example.

Madam Speaker, these last few years, I had to find within me the strength to continue to find ways to be able to support my family. Somehow, there has been an unwritten rule somewhere in the last seven years at least, to have some people, some professionals maligned without explanation. We have found it very hard to find steady employment. In one instance, I was offered an employment in a Government commercial institution, and signed the contract after securing the interview successfully. However, I was never to take up the position because its Minister saw it fit that I not be given that opportunity. I personally encouraged my own spirit to let this go and found it in me to say that perhaps God has a purpose for all these.

I hope Madam Speaker, that this august House will now understand why some like me are here today, because we want to be able to ask that the powers that be, look at us with human eyes and hopefully hearts that can understand the suffering and loss of dignity, and make amends.

I now am blessed to represent that portion of our society I had highlighted above, and I pledge to be their voice for justice so that they be given a chance to resume their normal lives and professions.

Madam Speaker, I, like my fellow honourable Members of this august House intend to fully participate in this form of Government, available to all elected representatives, and am guided in part by the words of the famous late Mahatma Ghandi in which he said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world."

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge and pay my respects to Fiji's traditional owners being the first settlers to set foot on these shores. Their accommodative spirit has allowed us all to be here as a multi-cultural nation today. I share their blood, culture and history and I am proud to be a native Fijian.

I also acknowledge the multi-cultural ethnicities who have made Fiji their home. Without you all, our nation would not be as interesting and vibrant as it is today. Thank you for choosing to make Fiji your home.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to pay acknowledgement to some crucial people who helped shape my journey into this august House. To my wife, Sainiana, our children, my parents, uncles and aunties, in-laws and other extended family members, I am always grateful for their love and support.

I take this time to acknowledge in particular my campaign team namely, *Nau Tamai* Ratu Peni, *Momo Tamai* Stella, *Nau Tamai* Susana, *noqu yaca*, *Tamai* Noa, and Josaia Murikanaka and of course the many others who joined us occasionally to campaign in conditions that was neither kind nor favourable. This journey started with them. *Manakwa saka vakalevu na veivakabauti.*

Madam Speaker, I also wish to now thank some of my traditional supporters:

- 1) *Vanua o* Nabobuco, Bureca, Turaga na Tui Nabobuco,
- 2) *Vanua o* Muaira, Navunitivi, Turaga na Vunivalu,
- 3) *Vanua o* Matailobau, Siko I Nabena, Turaga nai Taukei ni Waluvu,
- 4) *Vanua o* Lutu, Turaga na Tui Lutu,
- 5) *Vanua o* Nagonenicolo, Turaga na Vunivalu,
- 6) *Vanua o* Noimalu, *Turaga na Tui* Nakurukuruvakatini ,
- 7) *Vanua o* Nadaravakawalu, *Turaga na* Vunivalu,
- 8) *Turaga na i Liuliu ni Bose Vanua ena yasana o* Naitasiri; and
- 9) *Turaga Taukei* Waimaro.

Madam Speaker, I must not forget to thank the management of the Social Democratic Liberation Party (SODELPA) and campaign and support staff who rallied together for a course we all believed in. My presence here today has been greatly assisted by them and I thank them for the opportunity.

Lastly, to some of my professional and very personal friends (you know who you are), I will always be grateful for all their support and pray that they will always find favour in all that they do.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to respond in part to His Excellency the President's address delivered in this Chamber on Monday, 7th October, 2014. Accordingly, I thank Government's commitment to set aside \$10 million intended to assist indigenous Fijians to utilize their land. However, I am most concerned to note that the assistance is intended to facilitate the provision of electricity, water and roads to allow the landowners to use their land for subdivision or development.

Realistically, Madam Speaker, this assistance, because of its restrictions, may mean that the land runs the risk of still being un-utilised or underutilized by landowners if it were to be for farming by landowners which, I believe most in this House would agree.

Madam Speaker, with the cash limitations of landowners, developers will have to be sought and this eventuates with the land lease title in their hands, resulting lease money being the only benefit the landowner derives in most instances.

In summary, it is important to see the real impact of this \$10 million on the lives of these landowners and to reverse the notion of leasing out their land for others to develop and to make huge profits.

Madam Speaker, I ask Government on how this land to be developed will be managed. Will these be under the TLTB land management or will these be attached to the Land Bank?

Madam Speaker, I now wish to comment on the provision of electricity subsidy to low income families from the current 75 kilowatts per hour to 85 kilowatts per hour. Interestingly, I noted that the subsidy does not have a cut off threshold for the so-called low income families. Thus, it seems obvious that without the threshold, both low and high income earners will benefit from this subsidy.

Madam Speaker, I commend to Government that whilst the subsidy programme is well intended, that it directs its focus on priority areas as well, especially with some families' still awaiting electrification over a long period of time despite having paid for their deposits. It would augur well for Government to extend electrification to those who have yet to receive them.

On this note, seeing that Government is proposing a subsidy for low income families, I throw into the ring, a special request based on the fact that the Naitasiri Province supplies between 60 per cent to 80 per cent of Fiji's energy needs throughout the year. I ask that Government recognizes these and offers electricity for free to begin with for the people of the Tikina Naboubuco, Tikina o Noimalu and Tikina o Muaira, who mostly are the traditional resource owners whose land sits the two dams at Monasavu and Wainisavulevu. This is in addition to the lease money being received. This will be a social responsibility programme as well as a recognition of the immense contribution to Fiji by the native resource owners.

Madam Speaker, in addition to these, my fellow hill men from the *Tikina o Noimalu* still travel by foot or horseback to-date to reach the nearest road which gets them to the urban and rural centres. As a result, many of them have to leave their homes at midnight to be able to make the journey by foot or horseback to the nearest road access. To attest to the challenges faced by these villagers, in this

recent Elections, officials from the Elections Office had to travel by helicopter daily from Vunidawa Government Station to the villages of Tubarua, Nasava, Matawailevu and Narokorokoyawa in this Tikina of Noimalu to conduct elections.

Madam Speaker, on the provision of free water, whilst the free of charge proposed 91,250 litres of water per household per year relates to 250 litres of free water per day is laudable, this may indirectly result in a moral hazard. There is a risk to this exercise, as families to be assisted bear no or minimal risk in using the service and thus may incentivize wasteful usage of water. This situation may also lead to the exacerbating pressure on the current infrastructure to provide safe and clean water supply throughout the country.

I commend therefore to Government, that an awareness campaign on maximizing water usage complement this initiative to mitigate the potential impact of the identified moral hazard.

Madam Speaker, on this note, I also have three questions. Why peg the threshold to \$30,000.00 income earning per annum? Why not at \$20,000.00 or \$50,000.00? Again, why not provide free water for existing and new water source owners as recognition of their immense contribution to the people of Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I wish to also address the free provision of 250 millilitres of milk per child a day to be provided for children enrolled in Class 1 at all primary schools starting in Term 1, 2015. This is a health conscience assistance that will no doubt greatly benefit our children.

Madam Speaker, whilst we are giving out free milk, I commend to Government to look at the plight of dairy farmers who provide and have provided for most of Fiji's dairy needs including milk over the last decades. Recently, the gate price of milk was reduced. Understandably, the reduction in the price has come about due to the restructure.

Madam Speaker, I appeal on behalf of the farmers who are already struggling to make ends meet, that Fiji Dairy Limited honour the spirit of entrepreneurship long displayed by the farmers and retain the gate price of milk that the farmers had been previously receiving.

Madam Speaker, for such an important industry, it has to be everyone's concern as to what becomes of it, especially the affairs of the dairy farmers who have long invested in this business. Many of them have built their lives over these small dairy farms, have educated their children through the proceeds of their investments in these dairy farms, and they hold sentimental value over their association with this industry.

I am hopeful therefore, that the conditions of the recent restructure that has affected a great deal of them will be properly reviewed by Government and addressed. The reason for the restructure may very well be noble, given that Rewa Dairy had been under-performing and running at a loss for many years. However, the dairy farmers cannot be sacrificed at the expense of trying to establish a new thriving establishment. This will defeat the common notion of fair business practice.

Meanwhile, Madam Speaker, statistics have indicated a reduction in local milk production over the years. This reduction will beg the question on how and where the supply of the free milk intended for our class 1 students in 2015 will come from. At what expense does those forms of assistance come to government and to the taxpayers.

Madam Speaker, Government has promoted the concept of transparency and accountability as one of its pillars of governance. This is an area of interest closely associated with my profession as a chartered accountant. I will therefore, speak on the area of accounting as a service to the people. The work of being an accountant amongst other things requires undivided honesty, transparency and expediency.

Government in 2010, approved the creation of a legal framework to establish an independent body called the Independent Financial and Auditing Services Commission (IFASC). Its role set out was to monitor, hear complaints and institute disciplinary proceedings. IFASC was established to not only ensure adjudication into complaints that are subject to a transparent, impartial and accountable process but also administer the issuing of practicing certificates.

The demands on our profession in Fiji has been growing. At present, for example, as part of the free tuition assistance provided by Government to students every year, schools are expected to produce to the Ministry of Education their up to date audited accounts as part of the monitoring tool.

I am aware of that because of the limitation in the number of practicing chartered accountants regularized by the Fiji Institute of Accountants (FIA). Many schools that are already struggling financially, are finding it difficult to meet the high cost of adhering to the requirements of the monitoring tool set by the Ministry of Education. Thus most schools are now resorting to other means of facilitating the requirements.

Madam Speaker, I now question the progress status of the Independent Financial and Auditing Services Commission (IFASC). The formation of this Commission, had given hope to the many Fijian Chartered Accountants who have aspirations to operate their own accounting firms. I therefore, ask this august House to ensure IFASC expedites its role to allow for more chartered accountants to qualify for a Certificate of Practice and most importantly, allow for more local participation in the business sector.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude, please oblige me, as I bring to the attention of Government two outstanding issues raised by the electorates from my province of Naitasiri.

They are; firstly, the construction of the international standard Vunidawa Sporting Complex, which I am aware Government has already committed to funding and has initiated initial survey works for. Since the Naitasiri Rugby Team is widely acknowledged as one of the champion provincial rugby teams of Fiji, and has produced and continues to produce rugby greats, it is our hope that this sporting complex will soon be a reality. A re-known sporting province like Naitasiri surely deserves its own sporting facility other than to rely on the Ratu Cakobau Park in Nausori.

Secondly, I also bring to the attention of Government, the Savurua water source which has the potential of supplying water to the Vunidawa and Lomaivuna Government Stations and surrounding villages up to Naqali and beyond. Government had previously identified the water source as a potential source of water provision, and we are confident that should this project come to pass, it will be able to complement the current water supplies.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, like most Fijians, I have had to work hard and sacrifice because I was certainly not born into power, wealth and privilege. So I personally will always take the side of the elderly, sick, needy, disabled, small-business owners and workers, because I know what it feels like to be knocked down and then have to struggle and fight for every cent and victory.

I therefore, look forward to making meaningful contributions in this august House in the next four years.

Thank you for your indulgence Madam Speaker. May God bless us all and may God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, I rise as a member of the Opposition and the alternative Government to present my maiden speech in this revered Chamber for the first time. It is indeed a great honour and privilege to be able to do so, and I thank our Lord Jesus Christ in granting me this opportunity.

Madam Speaker, my warmest congratulations to you on your election. A proper recognition of your widely acclaimed services to this nation and I extend my support in your vital role. At this point, may I take the opportunity to applaud the comments made by the Assistant Minister for Education in saying that “real men do no hit or bully women”. Thank you, honourable Vijay Nath. However, Madam Speaker, contrary to that, I note with great concern that the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney General are trying to bully you in trying to be the time keeper and interjecting, which is in breach of our Standing Order.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, indeed the actions of the honourable Government Members speaks louder than their own words.

I also rise in union with Members on this side of the House, with a great sense of duty and purpose to undertake the essential steps necessary to make sure that our Parliamentary democracy works for the benefit of our people and the interest of our country.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured and humbled to stand before you, not only as an elected Member but also as a woman, a mother, a grandmother and also a retired civil servant who worked in the administrative cadre for 36 years in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Public Service Commission, Strategic Framework for Change and Co-Ordinating Office and Ministry of Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation prior to my retirement in 2012.

Madam Speaker, I recall the days when we worked together, I, as the Director, and you as the Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation. In this regard, I am indeed glad that our paths have crossed again. However, even though we are at different sides of the House, I firmly believe that we hold the plight of women and children close to our hearts. Regardless of our political affiliations, we can continue to work together for new constructive policies to ensure the empowerment and development of women in all fields of life and to eliminate violence and discrimination against women and children.

Madam Speaker, I also take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude that our beloved Fiji is back under democratic rule.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Returning Fiji to Parliamentary democracy is very important to me, because I am fully aware of the pain and struggles that ordinary people went through after the

coups. My husband, who is sitting in the public gallery today was unceremoniously removed from his job as the Director for Corporate Services in the Human Rights Commission without any valid reason being given up until to-date.

Madam Speaker, it has been 8 long years in the wilderness, but now we are in a position to move forward as alluded to by His Excellency the President in his opening of Parliament on Monday, 7th October, 2014. Accordingly, we are to enjoy real democratic freedom - our human rights restored and our judicial system unfettered and unbiased, Where the rule of law is without any prejudice, we have a media that is free of restrictions or bias to print, broadcast and televise the truth, keeping our citizens informed and informing us the duly elected representatives of our citizens views and concerns.

However, Madam Speaker, the fact that I cannot speak in my indigenous language in this honourable House as per your ruling yesterday tantamount to the breach of my human rights. So I ask the question, is this a democratic way of addressing this issue? Is this the new brand of democracy that we are hearing from the Government side? Why can the Government not come up with alternative options, like provision of Interpreters in this Chamber, which I am sure we are all familiar with from our exposure in attending meetings overseas.

Madam Speaker, let me also take this opportunity to congratulate all honourable Members for their successful elections to Parliament. In particular, I salute my honourable fellow women colleagues for taking a stand to be counted in this very important part of our history in returning Fiji to parliamentary democracy. Women are the mainstay of our homes, the glue in our societies, and the change agents who really make things happen. In Fiji, more than 50 per cent of our population are women, but today we only have 7 women out of the 50 Members of Parliament. Madam Speaker, this is only 14 per cent and the gap is glaring. However, there are options such the temporary special measure under the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) arrangement or the Quota system. I urge the Government to positively consider, so as to boost women's participation in politics. However, having said that, I look forward to working together with all these fine women and of course with all the honourable gentlemen to bring about positive and meaningful changes to the lives of our people especially women and children.

Madam Speaker, I also like to take this opportunity, to acknowledge all those that contributed to my campaign and success in this journey. To my parents, the late Naibuka and Leba Vuibureta, thank you for your upbringing and moulding me into what I am today. I am sure you are here with me in spirit and I once again hear your words of advice, encouragement, reassurance, through the Holy words of *Isaiah* chapter 41 Verse 10, and I quote:

“Do not be afraid for I am with you, do not be dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you and I will help you. I will uphold you in my righteous right hand.”

To my husband Kitione, whom we have journeyed together in an attitude of what is best for each of us, is best for both of us. Your unwavering love and support has helped to bring me here today. To my sons, Viliame, Isimeli and Alipate and their families, especially my adorable grandchildren, even though they are all away overseas, I thank you for your love and sense of humour, which has kept me grounded, focused and brings a smile when the going gets tough.

To my brothers and sisters, thank you for making Ta and Na's words of wisdom come alive through your love and support. To my beautiful big sister Mrs Mere Hudson, thank you for taking time out to come to Fiji to hold my hand on Elections day, during the count and sitting up into the night, awaiting the official result.

Madam Speaker, I also extend a big *vinaka vakalevu* to the following: my families from Mualevu, Vanua Balavu, Yacata, Bua in Fiji and abroad; my church family - *Tabacakacaka* Tacirua, Delaivalelevu, Kalabu, Wasewase Naitasiri, Wasewase Davuilevu and CMF community; my constituencies under the *vanua vakaturaga o Kalabu*, Makoi, Tacirua Heights, Newtown, Khalsa Road, Caubati and beloved province of Lau; my campaign team especially, Mr Kele Naidiri and family; Team of volunteers and all polling agents; The Adi Cakobau School Old Girls Network, especially my classmates and schoolmates, in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, USA, Indonesia and Fiji. Thank you for the "Waimanu Kui" spirit to "Always Leave this World Better than we Found it"; My teachers from Adi Cakobau School - thank you for teaching me to question, negotiate and debate; My friends, Flea Market vendors colleagues and all those who voted for me around Fiji and abroad; and the SODELPA party for giving me the opportunity to contest under their banner and vision. Thank you all for your prayers. You have indeed helped me find my political values and my dream

Madam Speaker, I am happy to be given the responsibility to be the spokesperson for Ministry of Women, Children, Poverty Alleviation and Public Service from the Opposition. In this regards, Madam Speaker, I applaud the inclusion of the "Protection of Children" in the 2013 Constitution. However, I note with great concern the absence of any specific provision for the development and empowerment of women. And as such, it remains unclear as to what coordinated plan the Government may have. However, that being said, I look forward to the upcoming Budget session to see what the actual budgetary allocation for the Ministry as a whole and for the Department of Women is. At the end of the day, budgetary allocations mirrors the Government's mandate and commitment and it is the true measure of their words as expressed in previous statements and those to come.

Madam Speaker, please allow me in response to His Excellency the President's Address in opening Parliament on Monday, 7th October, 2014. May I highlight some issues that were brought to my attention during my campaign trips in relation to the listed freebies like "free water and free electricity".

The Vatuyalewa community in Tovata, Laqere do not have piped water supply and yet they are the nearest settlement to the reservoir in that area. Each household have plumbing connections done yet for some reason they are still not connected to the main water line. To this very day they are still using water from the well and rainwater. There is also a community within Wainibuku – Nakorovou that is not connected to the main FEA grid.

Madam Speaker, if we are serious about poverty alleviation then accessibility to safe piped water supply and electricity should first be addressed before giving out "freebies".

Madam Speaker, unemployment is high along the informal settlements from Tacirua – Kalabu to Tovata and Makoi areas. It seems that the Government's solution to the country's problems is to spend, spend and spend on freebies. Of course, sometimes one might spend to get results, but one must spend in areas where one obtains not only a significant return on the investment, but where one achieves a variety of positives.

Madam Speaker, activities and industries that create the most jobs should be where our focus is. Job creation alone addresses and resolves many other social and economic problems. We should create more jobs, improve inflows of foreign direct investments, and address the lousy wages our people are currently earning, improve people's skills so they are employable, design specific programmes that will assist our women and young people who are unemployed and those dropping out of schools.

Madam Speaker, the Tacirua Heights area (where I live), along Khalsa Road and wider Nasinu area have been continuously faced with the rubbish collection issue. Concerns raised with the Suva

Rural Local Authority have been knocked back to the Nasinu Town Council and until now nothing has been resolved. But we witnessed the distribution of free rubbish bins on the eve of Elections in the same area. For a cleaner, sustainable environment, the people need assistance in proper waste management and not free rubbish bins.

Madam Speaker, part of my constituency is the Lau Group and I am proud to say that they are skilled crafts makers

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, thank you very much for your statement. Your time is up.

I am sorry, I read the time wrongly. You may carry on, honourable Member.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Therefore Madam Speaker, any poverty alleviation programs for our beloved Province, Government must include sea and air transportation as a priority in the Developmental Plan.

Madam Speaker, let me say something about the Civil Service. In the last 8 years the Civil Service has seen some interesting pertinent issues and please allow me to name just two. The first one is the heavy militarisation of the Civil Service. As witnessed by military officers taking up senior Government positions, some of them are still in the Service and others have graduated to becoming politicians. However, now that we are back to democratic rule, we ask the question when will these military personnel go back to the barracks?

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the second issue is the massive increase of the Permanent Secretaries salaries without any proper Job Evaluation and which totally disregarded market relativity. The salary increases was beyond 100 per cent depending on the size of the Ministry but what is important, we must note that that increase did not trickle down to the Deputy Permanent Secretary and those below. The difference between the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary's salary is almost 200 per cent. How can you justify that? There is a serious pay gap which is basically "Pay Discrimination".

Madam Speaker, please allow me along the same trend highlight the gaps that do exist with Members of Parliament's salary and emoluments benefits as stipulated under the Parliamentary Remuneration Decree No. 29 of 2014. A comparative analysis between the 2006 and 2014 remuneration showed us a massive upward adjustment from Assistant Ministers to the Prime Minister, and a downward adjustment to the Opposition and other Backbenchers. In this regard, Madam Speaker, may I suggest that in the spirit of justice and fairness, that a committee be established to review this pertinent issue.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Furthermore, Madam Speaker, for transparency and accountability in the Civil Service, there needs to be clear separation of powers. Simply, Separation of Powers in a democracy is necessary so to prevent abuse of power and to safeguard freedom for all.

May I highlight the three very important portfolios held by the honourable and learned Attorney-General – Minister for Justice, Minister for Finance, Minister for Public Enterprises and Minister for Public Service.

Madam Speaker, may I conclude and I take this time

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Opposition Member, I now read the signal right. Thank you very much for your contribution.

(Acclamation)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, honourable Cabinet Members, honourable Members of Parliament and our dear people of Fiji; my humble greetings to you all.

Madam Speaker, I take queue from my other colleagues in Parliament in congratulating you for your much deserved appointment as the first female Speaker of Parliament. Your appointment also reaffirms our Government's quest to involve more females into the mainstream Public Service and policy making. Little by little, inch by inch we are getting there and as true leaders in the Pacific, we are leading by example.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank His Excellency the President for his excellent Address and the platform that he has provided to us to take this country to greater heights.

Madam Speaker, my presence in this House today has been made possible by our FijiFirst Party and by the people of Fiji for their unwavering support. I am indebted to my Party leader, the honourable Prime Minister, and to the people of Fiji. Mainstream politics was something that I had never thought of or wanted to be in, until three months prior to the Elections. I am now here, and I fully understand the enormous responsibility bestowed upon me by my leader and while I am humbled by the appointment, I am ready to deliver. Unlike many in this Chamber who were chosen at defined areas or constituency, I campaigned throughout Fiji.

I had deliberately done that, despite knowing that there was more than enough votes here in Suva, closer to home but because I wanted to experience firsthand the living conditions that all the people in this country are faced with on a daily basis. Madam Speaker, whenever I will rise to speak in this policy-making House, I will have a clear picture of the people out there for whom the policy is being made, be they from Nasarawaqa, Bua; Lagalaga, Wainikoro; Nawaicoba, Nadi; Korotale, Rakiraki; or Nabitu in Sigatoka. I have met them, sat with them and shared their concerns over a cup of tea or bowl of grog, as we often do here at home.

I have a much better understanding of the kinds of things we have been taking for granted on a daily basis – electricity that comes on with a switch of a button on the wall or the water that starts running on a twist of a tap. Madam Speaker, these things are still a dream for those in the interior and the outer islands, but it would not for too long when those dreams will be realised as we now have the FijiFirst Government back in power, who will continue with its balanced development policies and take the comfort we have here in the urban and peri-urban corridors to them in the interior and the maritime zone.

Madam Speaker, in November last year, when I heard the Budget Speech of our Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, I was overwhelmed with joy and pride. It was after noting the numerous pro-poor growth measures that was announced by the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance to take head-on the hardships faced by our poor people in the country.

Madam Speaker, I still recall the announcement with regard to free education, and this announcement jolt my memories and took me back to 1982, 17 days after the passing away of my father, when the four siblings of our family (three brothers and sister) were summoned by my mother

and an ultimatum given that two of the boys would have to drop out of school to work on the farm as we could no longer afford to pay our bus fare and tuition fee of high school studies. We did some negotiating with the promise to work on the farm after school and during weekends, and harvest cane during school holidays to pay our bus fare and fees. The rest is history.

We survived but not many bright children were as fortunate as us that succumbed to the wrath of the system and the circumstantial destiny. They were left out of the run and their dreams remained a dream today. Those children of the rich and elite were destined to get secondary and tertiary education while those emulating from poor households, knew well in advance that their rightful place is the rural agrarian sector, the backyard garages, garment factories, et cetera, to name a few.

Madam Speaker, the inability of the rank and file to have a fair chance to access education has done incalculable damage to our society. The gap between the rich and poor has been increasing, poverty level has been rising and associated social ills of the society has been gaining prominence over the last few decades.

Madam Speaker, these are the things of the past now. Fiji stands tall amongst it's the spheres in making primary, secondary and tertiary education accessible to all in Fiji, immaterial of the background.

Madam Speaker, it is well established in economic growth literature that education training is critical for growth in developing countries, as well as poverty alleviation. Policy makers in the past have accepted tolerance and respect but despite this, not much had been done to reduce growing inequality between the rich and poor, and their quest for obtaining higher education. In the economic books of human capital theory, expenditure on education was treated as an investment, and not as a consumer item as some tend to think when asking how they will pay. An individual price this human capital in schooling and post school investment on the job training. Those countries who have increasingly emphasised this have also noted that highly trained and skilled manpower is capital element for real and balanced development.

Fiji had witnessed over the last four decades some massive imbalance in the supply of financial resources, and demand for it would demand far exceeding supply. As a result, those not able to access higher education would revert to low income jobs, and perpetual poverty. Prior to 2013, there existed three scholarship schemes; the Fijian Affairs Board Scholarship, PSC Scholarship, and the Multi-Ethnic Scholarship. All these schemes have limited budget not able to cater for the full demand for scholarship, leaving a large number of students gaining admission to high education studies to either drop out or seek alternative sources of financial help, such as withdrawal of parents' social security funds should their parents have any. Furthermore, due to the limited awards, those were created avenues for corrupt practices for the award of scholarships.

In December, 2013, during the 2014 Budget speech, the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Finance announced that primary and secondary education would now be free. In addition, the honourable Prime Minister announced that all students who get admissions to recognised tertiary institutions in Fiji will be given financial assistance to undertake higher education studies. This will be in the form of a loan which the students will require to pay once they begin employment. In addition to this, Government has also made allocations to 600 top students. The toppers will receive full scholarships in designated areas of studies identified by the Government in line with the country's human resource gap. The toppers are the pride of the country, Madam Speaker. These are the people who push the frontier of the country and set new benchmarks for the sustainable progress of the society and country, Madam Speaker.

Student loans programmes now exist in many developed and developing countries. The Student Loan Scheme is a mode of question, is a necessity in order to maintain the quality of academic programmes, to encourage needy students to attend higher education institutions, and to improve access to higher education while at the same time, containing government expenditures in higher education.

One may ask, if we have to pay up the loan at a later day, then is it free education? Madam Speaker, let us say, at a particular point in time a person is wanting to purchase a product. The person does not have personal funds or have any asset to mortgage, to get loans from commercial banks. The Government steps in to say, "Here is the money, and repay whenever you get employed, without the burden of interest rates that you would pay in the financial market", that is freer than the status quo. It frees you up from dropping out of the mainstream education system. It frees you up from getting into the clutches of the commercial banks who could provide high interest loans, should you have any asset to mortgage. It frees you up from cashing in on your parents only savings, safely kept for their retirement age.

Madam Speaker, if you go along the pathway, as suggested by some on the Opposition bench, then there will be no limit to what we have to provide; shoes, clothing, toothbrush, et cetera. Where do we end, Madam Speaker? The answer to this is logic, an international benchmark. That is exactly what the Bainimarama Government has done. Let us not defy logic, rationality and international best practice.

Madam Speaker, the Scheme provides for an opportunity for people from all walks of life in their ethnic background and income level or chiefly status to have a fair chance of getting access to higher education. The Scheme allows for identifying the best, the topper, and nurturing them, who would then go forward and push the country up.

Madam Speaker, schools throughout Fiji are now witnessing the rising student numbers because parents and students can now see their child able to access tertiary education without worrying about financial aid. In the absence of this in the past, there were a lot of dropouts in primary and high schools. Madam Speaker, we are now in a better position to say that in future, we will have a much better educated society than what we have now. The scheme will address the skills gap we have in Fiji, as well as ensure better utilisation of taxpayers' money as now they will be required to back over their employment period. Furthermore, no longer will parents be required to deplete off their social security funds for their children's education.

Madam Speaker, when everyone in the country is eligible to obtain an award, to obtain higher education studies, that it is beyond my comprehension as to why we should go back to the old system, which was fraught with exclusionary caveats, discrimination and favouritism.

Madam Speaker, in the past, there had been a lot of cases where corrupt civil servants awarded scholarships in exchange of money, depriving the other deserving cases. There are cases where deserving commoner *iTaukei's* were deprived of awards because influential chiefs had their way around to give awards to less-deserving family members and relatives. These are the things of the past, because everyone is now eligible to get the award as long as they fulfil the admission requirements.

Madam Speaker, the resounding victory of the *FirstFirst Party* demonstrates that people do not want to go back to the policies based on ethnicity and exclusiveness, but rather embrace policies based on inclusiveness and equal opportunity for all, to all irrespective of their ethnicity or religion.

Madam Speaker, allow me now to focus on the broad framework of the kind of education we want to have for Fiji, as we march ahead with a thorough understanding of our fundamentals, as well as the changes in our global market.

Madam Speaker, education should now allow people to think outside the box. Dream about the impossible, and pursue such dreams and it should allow people to acquire the required wisdom to build a just society that is firmly built on solid religious foundation and philosophical reasoning, without which we will continue to float aimlessly searching for the way ahead. And this journey of building a just society, we have to take stop of our heritage, our diverse culture, and build pathways to infer we all embrace an inclusive society, one which appreciates the goodwill of diversity amongst us.

Madam Speaker, I am entrusted with a very critical responsibility of furthering this objective, given that I hold the portfolio of Education, Heritage and Arts. I am humbled and honoured with this confidence that the honourable Prime Minister has bestowed on me, and I vow to live up to that expectation.

Madam Speaker, I must admit that we have some very exciting times ahead with lots of challenges. Industry stakeholders are questioning the authority of graduates that are coming out of our primary schools, high schools and universities. One can do a basic survey of the graduates and ascertain if they match the key attributes. You will be surprised with the outcomes. Just this Monday, we organised Industry Consultation Forum between training providers and industry stakeholders. The feedback was quite worrying to say the least. Madam Speaker, we have plans to address this issue.

Madam Speaker, majority of our graduates are template driven. They think they can do the job, as is already done at the workforce. This is not what the industry stakeholders want. They want critical thinkers who can question the existing way of doing things, bring in efficiency, and push the frontier. Without pushing the frontier, business progress will be stagnant, society will be stagnant and the country will be stagnant. We need to breed and channelled out critical thinkers, we need thinkers - a thinking society. Madam Speaker, we will now embark to deliver this, and we have plans for this.

Madam Speaker, our students continue to think that upon graduating from tertiary institutions, they will be provided with a job. We have failed miserably in getting them to think about being their own masters. Our education system needs to be changed drastically to get them to dream about being an entrepreneur in the area of interest, be it in farming business, an engineering outfit or grocery retail outlet. Madam Speaker, I am entrusted with taking this challenge head-on and collectively, we can do it.

Madam Speaker, I may not be too off the mark to say that our teachers, lecturers, primary, high school and university administrators have not lived up to the contemporary thinking and challengers. Competition for promotion, increasing student numbers, surplus fees and expansion has resulted in a race to bottom. The need to undertake a radical change in the work style, a shift from the race to bottom to race to quality and critical thinking.

Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama Government and the people of this country is looking forward to a radical change in our education system. For the next four years, I will work very closely with all my internal stakeholders to deliver this core vision, while a number of changes will be done from Term 1, 2015 including; the introduction of external exams in Years 6 and 10, reduction of paper work by teachers so that they can spend more time in teaching and class preparation and increasing teacher/student ratios, major changes will be made following a Report from the Education Commission that we will establish next year, following approval by the Cabinet.

In line with our manifesto, as announced by His Excellency the President, we will establish a modern technical college next year at Nasinu Secondary School, to provide Certificate I and II level of Trade qualification to all Year 10 dropouts. Furthermore, other technical colleges will be established throughout Fiji in 2015, to be operational from 2016. The current vocational service in high schools will cease this programme, and those students enrolled there will now attend all the technical colleges throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, let me assure our industry stakeholders that the shortage of skilled workers will now be a thing of the past from 2016.

Madam Speaker, an area alluded to earlier in my speech, that has been understood today is the area of heritage and arts. We are blessed with a diverse ethnic and natural heritage, culture and arts which gives us our true identity. We have a mind of raw talents which requires the small but significant professional guidance to get them to make a mark in the world scene. I will work very closely with our Department of Heritage, Arts and Archives, Library Services and Museum to further expand their work in Fiji so that the rank and file can fully appreciate the stock of cultural capital that lies therein. We intend to further align our Civic Education, Primary and Secondary School so that those graduating have a further understanding of our Constitution, heritage, diverse culture and arts. There are plans for these which we will be unveiled as we progress.

Given the above, the journey ahead will not be as smooth as anticipated. People have fixed minds, so they think their way of doings is the right way and the only way. There are things that change in status quo is a personal attack on them or a demonstration of their failure. They will not sit quietly. They will try to destabilise, create shrewd or email accounts and make personal attacks. My wife, who is a school teacher has already a fallen victim to this last week. They will form groups and engage in gossips making, thinking this is just another form that is allowed as the sun sets in the evening, and come tomorrow we will continue to ride on heavy pain. To them, the message is very clear, the status quo is not an option. We have to accept the realities that confront us, that we are part of the global village, and the changes there cannot be ignored. We have to embrace the new wave of technological revolution and be ready to harness efficiency in the service delivery from its use. Our work culture needs to be changed. We need to undertake critical thinking and change our mindsets.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with all honourable Members of this august House over the next four years, and will do all it takes to ensure that I do not fail in my responsibilities and the vision of our leader, honourable Bainimarama, as endorsed by the people of Fiji in the last General Elections is delivered.

Madam Speaker, I will remiss if I do not thank my family members who have been a pillar of strength during my campaign.

Madam Speaker, I am blessed with two mothers; Krishma Reddy and Kamla Reddy. To them, you are great, and to the people of Fiji, your aspirations will be met.

Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate what our party leader, the honourable Prime Minister Bainimarama said to the people of Fiji and to the world following the announcement of the General Elections results, where he said, and I quote:

“This victory is not my victory, but the victory of the people of Fiji. I will work for all of you, immaterial of whether you voted for me or not”.

Madam Speaker, I too echo the same sentiments. The General Elections is over, and let us now deliver the aspirations of the people of this country. I look forward to a very productive four years ahead. *Vinaka!*

(Acclamation)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I thank you for your statement.

Honourable Members, the Parliament is now adjourned to 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 16th October, 2014.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.17p.m.