

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2018

(Opening of Parliament)

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Page Nos</u>
Present	1-2
Communication from the Chair	2, 9
Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji	2-8

MONDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2018

The Parliament met at 3.03 p.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs,
Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and
Communications
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala, Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations
Youth and Sports
Hon. Mereseini Rakuira Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development,
Waterways and Environment
Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forestry
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Defence and National Security
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and
Meteorological Services
Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar, Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government,
Housing and Community Development
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty
Alleviation
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government,
Housing and Community Development
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial
Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Jale Sigarara, Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development,
Environment and Waterways
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development,
Environment and Waterways
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand, Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. George Vegnathan, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Sugar
Industry
Hon. Selai Adimaitoga
Hon. Mitieli Bulanauca
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Dr. Salik Ram Govind
Hon. Anare Jale
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Inosi Kuridrani
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu
Hon. Ratu Naiqama Tawake Lalabalavu

Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Nagata
Hon. Ratu Tevita Navurelevu
Hon. Niko Nawaikula
Hon. Vijendra Prakash
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua
Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi
Hon. Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Simione Rokomalo Rasova
Hon. Jese Saukuru
Hon. Rohit Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya
Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua
Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau
Hon. Peceli Waqairatu Vosanibola

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members of Parliament and Honourable Judges, I shall now proceed to receive His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji.

(His Excellency the President escorted to the Chamber by the Honourable Speaker)

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) JIOJI KONOUSI KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Chief Justice and Honourable Members of the Judiciary, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies High Commissioners, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corp, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: Good afternoon, *ni sa bula vinaka, asalaam alaykum and namaste.*

We are gathered together this afternoon to mark another milestone in our nation's march of progress. This month, we made our democracy more secure. We further cemented the historic achievement and legacy of the 2013 Fijian Constitution through the successful conduct of our second genuine parliamentary elections.

As I speak, Fijians around the world are living this moment in history alongside each of us, as they listen in on the radio and watch live on television, online and on social media. So, this is truly a national gathering, and a fitting reminder that the business of this Chamber is the business of all Fijians wherever they may be.

I celebrate the success of our most recent Elections with all the same enthusiasm and pride we shared four years ago in 2014, when we first celebrated the launch of our new and genuine democracy.

Once more, we have delivered credible, free and fair Elections declared as such by a Multinational Observer Group of 77 distinguished men and women from around the world.

Once more, we have conducted our Elections to the highest standards of transparency and accountability, guided by the exemplary leadership of the Electoral Commission and the Supervisor of Elections. In fact, I understand we recorded a 0.9 percent rate of invalid votes out of the more than 400,000 cast; a remarkable achievement. Voter turnout, however, was noticeably lower than what was recorded in 2014. I understand we were dealing with heavy floods in a few parts of the country, but I must use this opportunity to urge all Fijians, even if there is a bit of rain, to always strive to exercise their democratic right by voting in our Election. We must never allow complacency to take root in our democratic society.

Still, these Elections, once more, represents a profound and lasting victory for the rule of law, the independence of our State institutions and the strength of our young and vibrant democracy.

And once more, we have an outcome that reflects the will of the Fijian people. They have spoken and they have chosen you, the 51 Members of our new Parliament, to serve their interests over the next four years.

I see familiar faces amongst you, and I see new faces as well. I see tried and tested debaters and I see passionate politicians. I can envision the ideas, laws and policies yet undeliberated, and I am deeply proud to see more women represented in this august Parliament as well. But most importantly, when I look out on this honourable gathering, I see Fiji and I see the Fijian people, because that is whom all of you represent.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Chief Justice and Honourable Members of the Judiciary; the Honourable Prime Minister; Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers; the Honourable Leader of Opposition; Honourable Members of Parliament; Your Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen: Our democracy is a precious treasure, owned by the Fijian people and enshrined in the Fijian Constitution. I believe it to be a blessing from the Almighty God that we are finally a nation that holds to genuine democratic principles, where all Fijians are guaranteed an equal say in the governing of our nation and where the outcomes of our Election are respected by all Parties. It has not always been so in Fiji, and we know this all throughout.

Our journey towards the achievement of a truly inclusive democracy has spanned decades, and it is never ending. Democracy is not a static thing, it must grow with the people and incorporate newfound wisdom. It must confront problems and respond to demands that we cannot even contemplate today. So we will always have more work to do, and that work begins here with the elected representatives of the Fijian people.

Our path has been paved by many great figures in our history, legends of their time, who walked these same halls and engaged in debate of their own in this very Chamber. Proud Fijians, all of them, even though some when their entire lives without being able to ascribe to the common national identity that we all now share.

But that journey has not been steady, nor has it been unrelenting. We have stumbled along the way. We have suffered setbacks and carried consequences on a national and generational scale. And only recently have we been freed from the cycle of unrest, political instability and destructive vilification that plagued our nation for decades, where threats were made against our people, violence was wielded as a tool of oppression, and some Fijians were made to feel like strangers in their rightful home.

Those traumatic and destructive events in our past can never be repeated, but they must also never be forgotten because we risk repeating our history should we ever make the fatal mistake of moving forward while disregarding the lessons of our past. I will remind us of those lessons today.

The basis of the *coups* of 1987 and 2000 can be boiled down to the same blatant, harmful and indefensible lie, the lie that Fiji and the Fijian people are somehow stronger divided than we are united.

That lie was imposed on our people through acts of brute force and violence, accompanied by a political culture of fear, mistrust and communal antagonism that poisoned the minds of Fijians for generations, needlessly pitting them against their own countrymen and women, and doing untold damage to the fabric of our national life. And we suffer the consequences of those acts and the ills they brought down upon us to this very day.

But, finally, we are exposing that treacherous lie for what it was, and we have the power to cast that lie into our dark corner of our history where it belongs, through the establishment of our new democracy under the 2013 Fijian Constitution.

Since that time, through our great effort to realise the sacred promises enshrined within our Constitution, we have made dramatic and undeniable progress. We have shown that our unity is not a weakness, nor something to fear. It is, in fact, our greatest strength.

We have established institutions of State that remain fiercely independent, with the strength to fulfil their constitutional mandates regardless of which party forms our Government. The Judiciary, the Executive and the Legislative branches of our Government are all separate and distinct, each wielding its own powers and responsibilities, each fully independent. And we can never tolerate any effort, from any in this room, or from any Fijian, to undermine the very foundation of our democracy by attacking our institutions of State.

We particularly cannot stumble, blinded by our emotions, into unfounded assaults on any of those institutions, simply because we do not agree with an action they have taken. If a court does not rule in your favour, that does not mean our courts are not independent, it simply means your case carried insufficient merit. While you are free to then pursue any legal means at your disposal, that does not give you a pass to then subvert the systems that deliver justice in this country.

I know some in this Chamber have recently been subjected to the scrutiny of our Judiciary. Those matters are for the courts, they are not for this Chamber. And it is incumbent on all of us to respect the independence of the women and men enlisted in our Judiciary by respecting whatever outcome emerges from our courts, along with any actions taken by our independent institutions of State.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Chief Justice; Honourable members of Judiciary; the Honourable Prime Ministers; Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; Honourable Members of Parliament; Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: The role of a free media is to provide information to our citizens and create spaces for fair and truthful political debate, and we must recognise that Fijian media can play a key role in preserving our democracy. But in the media, we must always expect and receive a degree of responsibility in reporting. It is the obligation of every reporter, editor and publisher not to simply regurgitate the words of others, particularly if they know those statements to be untrue, but to challenge those statements with their own analysis, to ensure the truth shines through their leadership. To publish blatant lies or misleading statements is irresponsible and only serves to enable deceit and the subversion of our national unity, our institutions, our economy and our development.

It is unwavering the strength of our institutions, guaranteed by our Constitution that has brought our nation stability, and that stability has been the basis of our economy prosperity. We see that prosperity in the record nine straight years that the economy has grown and the tens of thousands of new jobs we have created.

We see opportunity in the revolution in Fijian Education. Education is now free and students can afford to travel to school. They study from free textbooks and have access to unprecedented new funding for tertiary loans and scholarships.

We see modernity in the new roads, bridges, ports, jetties and airports constructed to a quality that matches anything you will find overseas in developed nations. And we see a better life in the new development that has swept across the nation, bringing water, electricity and telecommunications to Fijians in even the most rural and remote regions of our country, at the rapid pace never before witnessed in our history. And when it comes to expending access to those essential services, services that literally transform our people's lives for the better, the pace of that development must be maintained or even increased.

By remaining rooted in the mandates of our Constitution, we have brought confidence to our people and to the rest of the world. It is clear that Fiji is ready to be able to take its rightful place in the global community and the world economy. We are rapidly becoming, not a follower, but a leader among nations on the causes that matter most to our secure future, and we are showing the rest of the world how sustainability and economic development can and must go hand-in-hand. Now, as an elected member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Fiji has another leadership opportunity in front of us as we continue to set an example to the world in the protection and promotion of human rights of all people.

When it comes to our economy, my Government has shown that we have a recipe that works. Through reliable revenue collection, a simplified tax system, sensible borrowing, visionary investment, consistently responsible financial management and smart confidence-building economic policies, we have set our economy on a path of long-term, enduring success.

There have been rigorous debates over the years in this Parliament about how an economy should be run, but ultimately, those arguments are decided by the strength of our economy today and my Government's record on the economy is one of historic, record-breaking success - plain and simple.

The issues surrounding the growth and management of our economy and our development are enormously complex, and we need to match the high level of sophistication with equally sophisticated political analysis. That begins with intellectual honesty. Complicated debates of policy cannot be reduced to political barbs, slogans and one line retorts. Your electorates deserve a far more holistic understanding of the matters put in front of the Chamber.

It is said that you do not truly understand a lesson if you are unable to explain it and teach it to another. So when it comes to great debates of our development, I expect all of you to not only fully understand the complexity of your debates, but to then bring that understanding along with patience and honesty to your electorates when educating them on our political discourse.

We can expect those debates to rage on over the next four years but I think my predecessor, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, puts it best when he said when opening this Parliament in 2015, and I quote:

“We no longer can afford to debunk or run down the economy for political expediency or to score political points. Building a strong economy requires confidence building measures by the nation as a whole. Economic growth means improved lives for all. It means prosperity for all and it means a brighter future for all Fijians.”

And:

“It is inexcusable to undermine the Fijian economy just for political gain. You must talk about your country first and not yourself. To debate, by all means, and wage a battle of ideas because that is the function of Parliament. But to do so with civility, humility and with national unity, national interest and common good always at the forefront of your minds. And to do so also with intellectual honesty. To know that an idea is better than yours, to know that an action or policy is going to be for the benefit of the country in the long-term and to still debunk them, is also intellectual dishonesty.”

The truth of those words has not changed over these past four years. The only thing that has changed since Ratu Epeli expressed that profound sentiment is that our economy has grown to even greater heights, our prosperity has spread even further across the nation and our future as a nation and as a people has grown only brighter.

Madam Speaker; the Honourable Acting Chief Justice and Honourable members of the Judiciary; the Honourable Prime Minister; Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers; the Leader of the Opposition; Members of Parliament; Your Excellencies; distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: We have moved our nation forward and realised these wonderful opportunities, all while preserving and promoting those most essential underpinnings of our cultural identity including protection of our customs, traditions and land of the *i Taukei* people. I am proud to say that our Constitution grants the strongest ever protection of *i Taukei* land in Fijian history, because of those protections there is no way that *i Taukei* land in this country can ever be permanently taken or alienated and there is no greater proof of that fact than this. Not one square centimetre of *i Taukei* land has been lost under either the Bainimarama or the FijiFirst Government.

I warned earlier this year when we were still undertaking preparations for the last Elections that we would most certainly be tested during the campaign. I warned that it would be tempting to descend into demagoguery and that we must rise above that temptation by challenging and contesting the Election on the basis of policies and principles - and truth. And I warned against race-baiting, appeals to ethnic identity and any efforts to divide our people by telling lies about individuals, communities or even entire groups of our fellow Fijians.

It pains me to say that some parties and politicians failed to heed my warnings. Quite unfortunately, we saw our political discourse descend into that dangerous and hateful rhetoric on many occasions particularly on the topic of indigenous rights. Again, little was said in the way of truth. Most of the rhetoric was designed to stoke fear, sow division and fuel unwarranted animosity and our nation and our people have suffered immensely for it.

I am here today to tell you that fear-mongering, communalism and that hateful style of politics must end this very moment because that backward way of thinking has no place in this august Parliament.

All of you have sworn solemn oaths or affirmed your allegiance to defend our democracy. You have sworn to protect our Constitution, the very document that allows you to come into this Parliament and grants you the privilege of speaking on behalf of our citizens. A Constitution that says we are all Fijians, a Constitution that guarantees common and equal citizenry, a Constitution that contains invulnerable protections for the continued communal ownership of *i Taukei* land and that recognise the unique culture, the customs, traditions and language of the *i Taukei*. And all of you now have unbreakable trust with God and the Fijian people to uphold that Constitution and the democracy it establishes for our country. And there is no attack on our democracy more potent than blatant attempts to foster disunity among our people.

Leadership is not about picking a popular strategy, if that means straying from the truth. It is not about playing politics to make headlines or landing punches on your opponents at the expense of the

national interest. Leadership is about speaking the truth, even when the truth may be difficult to hear. It is about putting forward real policy that is carefully crafted to create the greatest possible public good. It is about setting a vision for today, tomorrow, the year ahead, and even a generation from now, by putting in the work that yields long-term benefits for our children, their children and their children after them. And that is what our Government will strive to do in our upcoming term.

The legislative programme for this Parliamentary session will include new legislation on the formulation of a new Independent Land Tribunal, including:

- Public Health Protections;
- The modernisation of quarantine practices and procedures;
- Matters pertaining to landlord and tenants;
- Consumer protection;
- Town planning;
- The subdivision of land;
- The registration of engineers;
- Anti-doping;
- Patents;
- Industrial designs;
- Trademarks registration;
- Traditional knowledge and cultural expression;
- The registration of accountants;
- Public enterprises; and
- Substance abuse control.

As part of its legislative programme for the coming session, Parliament will also substantially review a number of existing laws. These will include the following:

- Financial Management Act;
- Immigration Act;
- Consumer Credit Act;
- Security Industry Act;
- Stamp Duties Act;
- Customs Act;
- Customs Tariff Act;
- Land Transport Act;
- Sale of Goods Act;
- Bankruptcy Act; and
- Police Act.

There are also fourteen (14) Bills from the past Parliament that were before the Committees that will be reviewed in this session.

The final objective of our agenda is not a single line-item, but rather a sweeping commitment that will touch every aspect of our development and the lives of all our people. That is the empowerment of young Fijians.

The success of young nations like ourselves is bonded to how well we engage with the young minds of our country. We can expect from them what we give back to them. We can either write-off their dreams as fantasy or their idealism as impractical or we can embrace our long-term future by

empowering our youth and listening to their new ideas. We can go that extra mile to bring the opportunities they deserve, make space for them at the decision-making table and bring them exposure, experience and mentorship. That is why my Government started holding national budget consultations with students directly in high schools and young people directly in universities, and that is what we will continue to do.

We will incentivise our economic growth in ways that produce new and better employment for young people. We will continue our massive investment towards the Fijian education system. We will grow our investment in the business ideas and ambitions of young Fijians and we will make new strategic investments that modernise and unleash a wave of technological innovation across the country.

Madam Speaker; the Honourable Acting Chief Justice and the Honourable members of the Judiciary; the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers; the Leader of the Opposition; Members of Parliament; Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen: In all of the deliberations in this Parliament, I implore you to always remember that no democracy anywhere in the world is inherently invulnerable. In the grand and sweeping saga of human civilisation, democracy remains a bold and audacious experiment, whether in its infancy or even in countries that are seen to be established democracies. Democracy can be eroded or even fall prey to fascism if it is not properly not cared for, cherished and improved over time, that is what elections are all about.

Unfortunately, Elections are also about differences because each party seeks to distinguish itself from the other. But now that the campaigning is done, we must come together as a nation to govern for the benefit of all the people. There will be disagreements, of course, but we are civilised people, and we can manage those disagreements with civility and respect, keeping before us the ideal that we are elected to solve problems and improve the life of every Fijian.

In our 48 years as an independent nation, only for these past four years have we lived a nation governed by our true democracy. And those four years all rank among the very greatest in our entire history. You see it as well as I do. The relationship between genuine democracy and prosperity is crystal clear. Our challenge is to make the next four years even greater, even more successful for our country. Four years on from now, let us all aspire to represent the Fiji that is stronger, more vibrant and more prosperous and a people who remain united, committed to common purpose and filled with true love for all their fellow Fijians and their nation. That is what true patriotism is all about.

Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu, shukriya, bhahut dhanyavaad* and may the Almighty God continually bless our beloved nation and our people.

(Applause)

(His Excellency the President was escorted out of the Chamber by the Honourable Speaker)

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the invited guests who are present in the gallery, in the Committee Rooms and members of the public watching the proceedings on television, internet as well as listening on the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament, particularly for the Opening of the Second Parliament Term under the 2013 Constitution.

I wish to remind Honourable Members that when Parliament next meets, we will proceed with the Motion to thank His Excellency for his most gracious speech.

I now take this opportunity to invite Honourable Members and invited guests for refreshments at the Marquee below. Honourable Members, Parliament now stands adjourned until Tuesday, 27th November, 2018 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.53 p.m.