

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER, 2018

The Parliament resumed at 9.33 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs and the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 28th November 2018, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

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

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now continue with the next speaker as listed on the batting order for today and I now call upon the Honourable Alexander O'Connor to have the floor.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and fellow Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery, and those watching from the comforts of their homes, or through the internet and listening to the radio: A very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, I rise to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for His most gracious Speech on the occasion of the Opening and first sitting of Parliament after the 2018 General Elections and to deliver my maiden speech.

Madam Speaker, in His Address to the nation, His Excellency the President said, and I quote:

“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 a rapid pace never before witnessed in our history. And when it comes to expanding access to these essential services, services that literally transform our people's lives for the better, the pace of that development must be maintained, or even increased.”

His Excellency the President further stated and I quote:

“The legislative programme for this parliamentary session will include new legislation on the formulation of a new independent land tribunal including public health protections amongst others.”

Madam Speaker, in the Republic of Fiji's five-year and 20-year National Development Plan styled, “Transforming Fiji”, which was launched in Bonn, Germany last year by our Honourable Prime Minister, the FijiFirst Government has already embarked on some of these initiatives and have already made significant progress in increasing the overall life expectancy of Fijians and improving health outcomes. Maternal and infant mortality rates have declined. Primary Health Care is well established, particularly with the recognition of community health workers.

To further enhance the existence in the community, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will be providing them with an insulated cubical as a workstation to tend to the sick and will have access to a computer to assist in the collation of patient information that can be uploaded to the patient information system database held at the division hospitals.

Substantial investments have been made in the construction and upgrading of hospitals, health centres and nursing stations. This include the recent opening this year of the Makoi Maternity Unit, the Nakasi Health Centre and the Vatukarasa Nursing Station in Tailevu, to name a few.

Construction on the new subdivisional hospital in Keiyasi which is expected to serve not only the provinces of Navosa/Nadroga but also the Bukuya and Nausori Highland areas is already underway.

The public private partnership proposed in the 2017-2018 budget release has witnessed the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Fiji and Aspen Hospitals of Australia for the management and operations of the new Ba Hospital and the Lautoka Divisional Hospital.

Current nursing stations are earmarked to be upgraded to health centre status due to the increase in population and the distance from the nearest subdivisional hospitals. New nursing stations will be constructed in rural and remote areas as and when the need arises and on approval and receipt of 60 percent of the landowning unit or *mataqali*.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will pursue strategies to tackle Non-Communicable Diseases in the country. A multi-sectorial approach through improved health education, production and adequate supply of fresh fruits and vegetables and promotional and awareness campaigns will be further enhanced to address this issue.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services will raise the standard of ambulatory services to another level by introducing paramedical services. This will see ward nurses and drivers enrolling in an eight to nine months course before being assigned to specially-outfitted ambulances, purchases for which are already in the process of delivery.

Madam Speaker, please allow me first and foremost to give thanks to the Almighty for providing me the strength, wisdom and guidance to get through each day, and allowing me the noble task of serving you all, the citizens of our beloved Fiji.

I wish to thank my late parents for their exemplary parenting of me and my siblings for the persons we are today.

I wish to thank the FijiFirst movement leader, the Honourable Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama and the FijiFirst movement General Secretary, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, for confiding in me and allowing me to stand again in the recent Elections.

I wish to thank my beautiful wife, Margaret, who has always been by my side, offering guidance, wisdom and comfort; our son, Lyndon; our daughter, Erica and her family; our nephew, Cameron, who have all been pillars of strength, together with relatives and friends for their unwavering support during the campaign period and leading up to the recent Elections.

I wish to thank Alan Petersen and the people of Matei and Naselesele; *Tui* Rabi and the people of Lovonivonu; the people of Tavuki and Narusa in Wairiki; Herbert Whippy and the people of Kasavu and Mokusiga; Romulus Lanyon and the people of Kuladrusi, Naqere and Vatudamu; Dharmendra and Praveen of Labasa; *Tui* Nasau, his son Livai and the people of the *Tikina o* Nasau, Lepani Driu and Ilaisa Dau of Barotu in Ra; Kamlesh Chand of Rakiraki; David Handyside of Vatukoula; Naita of Naidrodro Ba; Mahen and Suren of Lautoka; the Campbells of Nakavu and Dinesh and Kanta of Malolo in Nadi.

I wish to thank all those Fijians who voted for me and to those who did not, may I say, I am here to serve you all the same. I wish to thank the FijiFirst movement stakeholders and supporters for their tireless efforts and support prior to and during the campaign period and the eventual outcome of the Elections.

Madam Speaker, my career path spans some 42 years since my leaving school in 1969. Upon leaving school, I joined Millers Limited in Suva as a trainee Fitter Machinist, specialising in engine and machinery repairs on marine vessels, particularly fishing boats. Having not been compensated for an injury I sustained during that employment, I left to seek work in Lautoka a year later.

In 1971, I took up a position as Fleet Supervisor with United Touring, responsible for scheduling coaches and chauffeur cars until 1973, when I joined Fiji Tours /Atlantic & Pacific Travel as a Tour Coordinator, being responsible for large tour groups from the United States, South America and Europe.

In July, 1975, I enrolled with the then Royal Fiji Military Forces Navel Squadron and was one of those fortunate enough to have sailed on one of the three former US Minesweepers - *Kula*, *Kiro* and *Kikau* from Seattle in the US to Fiji via Hawaii.

During this time, I attained my Marine Engineer's Certificate from the then Derrick Technical Institute, now FNU. In 1979, I opted out of the Navy and secured a position as Chief Engineer on the Cakaudrove, Bua, Macuata's landing craft, *MV Duavata*, trading as Ferry Freight Services.

Whilst, with Ferry Freight Services, I was seconded to Wong's Shipping to their vessel *MV Tovata* to the Gilbert and Ellis Islands, now known as Kiribati. Whilst with Wong's Shipping, Ferry Freight Services went into liquidation and upon my return to Fiji, I joined Carpenters Shipping as a Boarding Officer in January, 1980.

Between 1980 and 1989, I rose through the ranks to become Transport and Wharf Operations Manager. During this time, Carpenters Shipping was the principal customs clearance and transport provider for the major overseas contractors, as well as locals, for the Monasavu and Wailoa Hydro Project and the Nagado Water Catchment Project.

In 1990, I joined Union Steamship as Operations Manager, managing Interport Shipping and Wong's Shipping Joint Venture Consort Shipping Vessel, the *MV Spirit of Free Enterprise*, the largest roll on/roll off and passenger vessel ever to operate in Fiji.

In 1991, I jointed Foreign Shipping Line as Operations Manager, a consortium of Samoa, Tonga, New Zealand and Fiji business ventures.

In February of 1992, I was offered the position of Regional Manager West with Fiji Gas Limited based in Lautoka and was instrumental in changing from customer cylinder exchanges to bulk filling operations at resorts and hotels in the West, including throughout the Mamanucas.

Also during my tenure, saw the installation of a 200 Liquefied Petroleum Gas storage tank almost 8 kilometres of High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) trunk main and over 200 kilometres of reticulated Medium Density Polyethylene (MDPE) ring and branch lines at all residential subdivisions and Resorts on Denarau Island.

I was also involved with the reticulation of LP Gas, MDPE ring mains at both, the Outrigger on the Reef in Sigatoka and the InterContinental Resort and Spa at Natadola.

Whilst still with Fiji Gas, I took up a challenge of becoming the Manager Training, Occupational Health, Safety and Environment in 2004.

In July of 2009, Origin Energy Australia, Fiji Gas's parent company, positioned me in Pago Pago, American Samoa, to become its Regional Operations Manager, Polynesia. This position required me to relieve Country Managers and carry out Terminal Engineering Audits in the two Samoa's, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, and training all personnel in all aspects of the LP Gas industry, including Fiji. I retired from Origin Energy Australia in May of 2012.

Madam Speaker, since retiring. I have been a freelance consultant for a host of Fijians requiring assistance for housing, education, power, water, sanitation, transport, roading and land issues with a success rate of 80 percent plus.

Madam Speaker, my interest in politics started in 2013, when close friends and relatives suggested that I contest the 2014 National General Election to which I took up. Although I was not successful on the first count of votes, I entered Parliament in July of 2015 upon the resignation of a Party member. In September of 2016 after a Cabinet reshuffle, I was appointed the Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services with particular responsibilities to Public Health.

My Leadership qualities, managerial skills, customer service excellence, extrovert personality and practical expertise augured well for me to fulfil my continued role as Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion I wish to take this opportunity in congratulating you on your return as Speaker of this Parliament for another term. You are an inspiration to the feminine gender of this country, and abroad. I also congratulate Honourable Veena Bhatnagar for her nomination and appointment as Deputy Speaker.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, and may God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament: Good morning, *bula vinaka, ram ram, namaskar, as-salamu alaykum*.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured and pleased to be part of this august Parliament and once again, as a Member of Parliament, and I rise to add my voice to the Honourable Members who have spoken before me, in thanking His Excellency the President for his most gracious and stimulating Address at the inauguration of Parliament on Monday, 26th November, 2018.

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you, first of all, on your re-election as Speaker of this House. I also wish to congratulate the Deputy Speaker for her appointment to that high office. For both women to be Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Fijian Parliament, it is an achievement worthy of note and one which will be an inspiration to all women, not only in Fiji but the Pacific as a whole. Equally important, I congratulate all Honourable Members for their election by the people of Fiji as Members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Prime Minister, together with the Honourable Attorney-General, for allowing me to be part of the FijiFirst Team in the recent General Election.

I wish to, again, acknowledge them for having confidence in me to serve under their able leadership, and also to serve my fellow Fijians, especially farmers in the rural communities as Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to convey my deepest appreciation to those who voted for me, for their confidence and trust in my ability to represent them and their concerns in this Parliament. It will be remiss of me not to acknowledge the hard work of my campaign team and many friends of their support and encouragement.

I would also like to pay a special tribute to my mum, brothers, sisters, family and members in Canada, USA and New Zealand. My special thanks to my wife, Mrs. Premila Pillay, and my daughters, Deepa, Ekta and Heema for their support, who had always stood by me and are a source of inspiration today.

I would like to thank Mrs. Sulu and Mr. Ritesh of Mata Trading in Ba, Mr. Kamlesh and Mr. Yogesh and the Nukuloa Family for all their support.

Also, I would like to thank the *Turaga na Tui Ba, Turaga na Tui Naloto, Turaga ni Yavusa Nasolo, Turaga ni Koro* and villages of Toge, Balevuto, Vatawai, Tabataba, Cerelali, Rara, Nanuku, Yaloku, Nailaga, Maururu, Koroqaqa, Nakavika, Tavarau, Naitamusu, Votua, Natutu, Nawaqarua, Sorokoba, Vadravadra, Nasolo, Sasa, Natalacake, Natunuku, Navala, Nadevo, Koroboya, Tabalei, Tabaquto, community leaders and residents of Moto, Nadrau, Chinachotti, Kumkum, Naruku, Vatusui, Nacaci, Toge, Nukuloa, Balevuto, Dogusu, Babriban, Tabataba, Maranitawa, Livanasasa, Navoli, Navatu, Waivuka, Itatoko, Wailailai, Vatiyaka, Waiwai, Talaiya, Tarivo, Vatulaulau, Wailagi, Tauvegavega, Namosau, Clopcott Street, Ba Town, Yalalevu, Rarawai, Vaqia, Korovuto, Vunisamaloa, Koronubu, Benai, Qerelevu, Namau, Nakavika, Naboutolu, Tivoro Lane, Veisaru, Namada, Bulabula,

Busabusa, Solosolo, Nandhari, Nabia, Varavu, Raviravi, Sarava, Karavi, Tavarau, Tuvu, religious leaders, all the market vendors, cane cutters, carrier and bus drivers, cane lorry drivers, fishermen, FSC workers, the Government workers in Ba and all the people of Ba, Fiji and abroad.

Madam Speaker, I take this time to thank the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security, Honourable Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu, on his leadership in the last four years. I am equally honoured to be serving this term with the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Madam Speaker, my appointment as the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment reminds me of my humble upbringing. As a son of a sugarcane farmer, the late Gopal Pillay of Moto, Ba, growing up with my many hardships, I was able to learn two important things in life.

First, there is no substitute for hard work because success and what we are today is determined by our perseverance, sacrifice and commitment. That is why I chose to be on this side of Parliament as this Government reflects my values and what I stand for. Well, one cannot look further to see the unprecedented record of development and economic growth set by this Government in the past nine years, which is a result of hard work.

The second most important thing I learnt was service to family and community. By seeing family and community members going through various hardships, has motivated me to make changes by improving people's lives in whatever ways I can, especially to the children, women and the elderly. This desire has shaped my career in the last 22 odd years before I joined Parliament in which I chose to be a social worker. Serving my community is what I will continue to do. Serving all fellow Fijians is an honourable calling which I will endear.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Address is one of the remarkable clarity of purpose. We all heard his call for Honourable Members of this Chamber to dedicate ourselves to genuine equality for all Fijians, working cooperatively together to advance the national interest, adhere to the high standards of personal and professional conduct and improve the lives of ordinary Fijians to better equip our young people for satisfying roles in a growing and thriving economy.

Madam Speaker, we can only achieve these ambitions if we remember that we are servants to the citizens of Fiji, who elected us to this august House, to serve for the greater good for all rather than our individual interests.

Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate the leaders of the FijiFirst Government on their vision in strategically placing these key ministries under one leadership. Relations amongst water, food security and the environment are not new, but now are gathering increased attention as a result of some very visible drivers. There is a real opportunity for an alliance between environmental works, water resource management, rural development and agriculture experts to push for the preservation of ecosystem that intensify food production in a sustainable manner that will enrich farmers, especially in the rural communities.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural and Maritime, Waterways and Environment under the leadership of Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy will continue the momentum already set by this Government in the last four years. We will see that the agriculture sector plays a significant role in Fiji's economy, not only for both employment and opportunities for sustaining livelihoods, it has to play a pivotal role in foreign exchange earnings through agriculture exports.

Madam Speaker, we will focus on modernising the sector throughout the whole value-chain, encourage more mechanised methods of crop cultivation and harvesting, we will encourage more

research and development and we will work closely with the private sector to increase efficiency in crop production and agro-processing.

Madam Speaker, we will also focus on improving the delivery of agriculture support services to our farmers. Improving agriculture means that we will directly support our farmers, our households and communities. We will continue to support our agro-processors and exporters, as they add value to our produce and expand exports opportunities.

Madam Speaker, in support of the Fiji's Civil Service Reform, we will push for institutional review of the Ministry of Agriculture to bring about efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

Madam Speaker, under the leadership of the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy, we will continue the work of protecting Fiji's natural resources and ecosystems through the effective enforcement of the:

- Environment Management Act 2005;
- Endangered and Protected Species Act 2002;
- Ozone Depleting Substances Act 1998; and
- Litter Act 2008.

Madam Speaker, the enforcement of these legislation is aligned to Section 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, and fulfils the vision of the FijiFirst Government in ensuring that all Fiji citizens live in a clean and healthy environment, and to have that environment protected for the benefit of Fiji's future generation.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural and Maritime, Waterways and Environment will work towards the:

- improvement and standardisation of all waste disposal sites in the country;
- introduction of waste minimisation programmes;
- advocating on minimising the environmental impacts of all developments in the country; and
- introduction of strategies and policies that will protect Fiji's unique biodiversity.

Madam Speaker, with respect of 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 the Honourable Members of Parliament, that I will continue to contribute positively in the days to come in the Chamber, so that our nation moves forward as expected by all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members, I thank you.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Vijendra Prakash to take the floor.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Distinguished Guests, members of the media organisations, dear Fijians, and family and friends from abroad; *ni sa bula vinaka, sita ram, as-salamu alaykum and sat shree akal.*

Madam Speaker, on behalf of my family, I am privileged to glorify FijiFirst's victory to the Almighty God, who has blessed this nation with a very fine weather since the Honourable Prime Minister took oath for a second term to lead this nation. Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister, for blessing this nation with your sincere, strong leadership and your complete commitment to contribute to the entire nation through the best leadership qualities that is unmatched by any other leaders. This is evident from the past 12 years as one can actually see how much the country and its people have benefitted under your leadership.

Madam Speaker, my heartfelt congratulations to you for being appointed as the Speaker of this august House for another term of Parliament. The Honourable Veena Bhatnagar - from your golden voice on Radio Fiji II to Member of Parliament for a second term, Assistant Minister and Deputy Speaker's position in itself speaks of your valuable qualities.

Madam Speaker, your good self and Honourable Veena Bhatnagar indeed are good role models to other females in becoming future politicians and leaders of our nation. Thank you for all your achievements.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President of Fiji is highly praised for a wonderful and positive message he gave to all of us during the opening of this new Parliament session. His words of wisdom, guidance and clear vision will lead the nation for the next four years by all elected Members of Parliament need to be embraced and appreciated. I sincerely hope that all Honourable Members from the Opposition side also pay similar respect to His Excellency and understand the sentiments expressed by His Excellency for the benefit of our nation.

Madam Speaker, our FijiFirst supporters have asked me to thank the Honourable Prime Minister's Government for their past achievements namely:

- Making new water supply available for all villages in Serea, Naitasiri and supplying electricity to most villages of the province;
- Adding new and extra health facilities along the Suva and Nausori corridors in the Western and Northern Divisions;
- Investing in the double storey building consisting of three classrooms, a library, a computer room and office at Vunidawa Sanatan Primary School which was damaged during *Tropical Cyclone Winston* and which will be ready soon;
- Assisting dairy farmers during most difficult times in our history when the farmers were affected by Tuberculosis (TB), Brucellosis and natural disasters. The timely assistance provided then and now is surely going to revive the dairy farming business for the rural farmers in Central and Western Divisions;
- Facilitating an appropriate site for Hindus to complete the final rituals of death ceremony of their beloved ones in *Shrad dhaam* at Vatuwaqa Cemetery; and
- Construction carried out to the Nadi and Nausori Airports to uplift Fiji's image as an international destination to travellers.

Madam Speaker, these are only few of the many developments completed and still taking place since the last 12 years that has touched the hearts of many Fijians and our former citizens.

Madam Speaker, I was thrilled to take note of the initiative of the current Government towards strengthening National Marketing Authority and future export market for rootcrops, vegetables and fruits growing locally in the world market with better pricing so that the farmers who are involved in farming enjoy measurable return.

On the same note, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government's assistance towards the dairy industry in future is very much needed and appreciated. This includes transportation, subsidies, dairy and cow feed subsidies, well-trained agricultural staff, livestock loss replacement programmes and negotiation for fair farm gate pricing to milk suppliers.

Madam Speaker, this will directly benefit the farmers in rural areas, who will assist in developing our agro industry further.

While thanking for past and future milestone success of the Government, Madam Speaker, I will fail in my duty if the energetic, hardworking and dynamic Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications is not acknowledged in my contribution today.

Honourable Minister, Sir, as a team leader with the Honourable Prime Minister, both of you have done a lot of good in the development of this nation and add a smile to a vast majority of Fijians. Our history of achievements for our beloved Fiji would not have been possible without your dynamic team work.

Madam Speaker, let me personally acknowledge and thank the people and organisations that were behind FijiFirst, and my success as a candidate.

My late father who was a strong supporter of Honourable Prime Minister Bainimarama would have been very proud to be part of our victory in this elections. My 93 year old mother and my siblings, friends and families who all reside in Surrey, Canada, are enjoying the victory of FijiFirst. Thank you Sam, Nam, Moe, Danny, all my sisters in Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand for your support.

Madam Speaker, any united family becomes an asset to the nation. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the immense support of my wife and my children, Seema, Aashil and Rishil and their spouses, Ashvin, and Rachael respectively, and my grandchildren and all my relatives, friends in Fiji and abroad and most of all my campaign team led by Yogeshwar Sing, Jagdish Bali, Joji Ramasima, Mesake R, Jovesa, Semi Saro, Iliki Latilati, Binay Deo, Raaj Kumar, Pt. Sanjay Narayan Sharma, Ram Chandar, Ami Chand, Ram Brij, Dharam Raj, Pundit Jagdish Sharma, Tajeshwar Sharma, Diren Dular, their family and their other friends for being my strength during this election. All of them campaigned for entire FijiFirst.

The chiefly family of *Tikina* Rara/Lomaivuna, Naitasiri, *mataqali* landlord and the family members of Rara Vunimoli, Rara Vanuavatu and Rara Lomawai for their entire blessings, Budhai family and all tenants in *Tikina* Rara, Naitasiri for leasing their land for more than 100 years and helping make what we are today.

Madam Speaker, we are proud when organisations are behind our success. The die-hard supporters of FijiFirst are:

- National President and National Executive, Council Members and staff of Sanatan Fiji;
- Sanatan Rewa Branch - officials;
- Naari Sabha (Women's Wing);

- Youth Wing

This time 90 percent of Sanatan Branches in the nation were behind us; the FijiFirst Youth Groups and the uncountable volunteers throughout the nation.

Madam Speaker, allow me to praise the Almighty Lord for my journey to Parliament, it is as follows:

1. First to go from Vunidawa to India to complete my Bachelor's Degree and be in Parliament;
2. First from *Tikina* Rara in the province of Naitasiri to become a teacher trainer, Special Administrator for Suva/Lami and Member of Parliament;
3. First Dular family consisting of 17 siblings to be a Member of Parliament;
4. First National Secretary of Sanatan Fiji and Sanatan Rewa Branch to be a Member of Parliament.
5. First Sanatan leader to be part of intra and interfaith dialogue team to Asia/Pacific assisting in resolving religious conflicts in the region.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Madam Speaker, I think it is enough.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, with my vast experience in religious and social organisations I urge this honourable House to leave behind old politics on race religious lines and join hands to embrace the changes needed to develop our nation into a new era of development which is inclusive and benefits every member of our community.

Madam Speaker, this is the challenge that the FijiFirst Manifesto is providing for all Members of Parliament present in this House to embrace.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, being a Member of Parliament I shall not only serve my province of Naitasiri but the entire nation. I request members of the public to approach me freely for any matters that I can be of use to anyone, irrespective of their political affiliations. I know your languages and want to understand you better to try and solve the problem that you have with your Ministers and the Honourable Prime Minister.

Finally, I would like to thank the Supervisor of Elections, Mr. Mohammed Saneem, for his excellent execution of the 2018 General Election.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Madam Speaker, many of the people who did not vote during this Election reliably informed me that they were supporters of FijiFirst and were sure that our Party would win this Election. However, all have promised to vote in the next election to increase our number further in Parliament come 2022 General Election. I hope, Madam Speaker, the Opposition corrects its calculation and tells the House what 147 stands for.

Madam Speaker, my career as a secondary teacher and Head of Science and Vice-Principal for 20 years was an enjoyable journey to teach thousands of students of all ethnicity in rural, suburban and urban schools. My colleagues, including Honourable Vijay Nath, never discriminated but assisted each child under our care to choose the best career path in their future endeavours and become good ambassadors of Fiji and to the entire world.

Madam Speaker, whilst being a teacher trainer for another seven years at the Fiji College of Advanced Education, my work as Head of School of Science was to produce young teachers for Fiji and the rest of the world to successfully teach science and become scientists. They served in many fields to help develop nations, assist mankind protect flora and fauna in the entire earth and make the environment safe for all living things.

Madam Speaker, I have been a dairy farmer from childhood. I like milking cows until the bucket is full with pure fresh Fijian milk supplied to others who are in need in our nation and so do the other dairy farmers at all times throughout the year.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of this august House, thank you for listening, have a blessed four years, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. At this juncture, we have a big group of people in the gallery who have just come in.

I would like to welcome all the men from the village of Serea who are here with us. And, of course, we have family members who have continued to come to this sitting and I welcome them as well. Thank you for your interest in your Parliament.

I now invite the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to take the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is the tradition during the debate on the opening of Parliament to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. But I must say that this time, it is difficult to say it.

Madam Speaker, I respect our President. Just as you symbolise the unity of Parliament, His Excellency the President should, at all times, symbolise the unity of our multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious nation. He does not get involved in politics. His job is to give to Parliament the Address prepared for him by the Government.

But I agree with my Opposition colleagues. Those who prepared his Address were far from gracious, and they should not have put him in the position of giving a speech that was a continuation of the FijiFirst Party Election campaign.

It is also, Madam Speaker, traditional for the Opposition in the new Parliament to congratulate the Government on its Election win. That is, for now, the official result. The courts may still have something to say about it, but for now, Madam Speaker, we respect the official result.

While I am here, let me also remind the Government that we are the loyal Opposition. We are loyal to this country. We are loyal to the people. Our role in the Opposition is to serve the people. We do this by scrutinising and criticising the Government when their actions require criticism.

We do this by our free alternative policies to the people, and I assure the people of Fiji today that that is what we will do in this Parliament. Madam Speaker, last week we reminded the country that the Election may be over, but Fiji's problems are not as we have:

- serious poverty and economic inequality;
- a failing sugar industry;
- under-developed opportunities in agriculture;
- no new industries to create jobs and opportunities for our young people;
- poor public services;
- our education, health, welfare and disaster relief are in pitiful states;
- Fiji's score on NCDs and domestic violence are rampant and amongst the highest in the world.

Madam Speaker, we can fix these problems faster if we work together.

We have said that if the Government wishes to work positively with the Opposition parties, we are ready. We will do it from the Opposition. I have said that we will scrutinise and criticise because that is the Opposition's job. The Government also has the job in this Parliament to listen to that scrutiny and criticism and to change where needed, this is what democratic governments do.

Only one party in this Parliament has fewer seats than before, and that is the FijiFirst Party. The people of Fiji

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... I will let them finish, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... but, Madam Speaker, the additions are not good.

The Honourable Prime Minister has been reported by the media to have criticised prison officers for not voting for him. On the campaign trail, he described the villages of Vunidogoloa in Cakaudrove as '*Liu muri*', because they did not vote for them after they got new houses.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Whatever message he gave those voters, Madam Speaker, they certainly sent him a message back, he got one vote there.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister needs to be reminded that the Election is over.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- As long he has the Prime Minister's job, he must serve everybody.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You do not know.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Whether they voted for him or not, that is what the taxpayers of Fiji are paying for him. They are not paying for him to complain about who did not vote for him.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Not true, you've got to tell the truth.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Prime Minister talks about the politics of fear, yet, Madam Speaker, it was his right-hand man who seats next to him, who told an audience in Hindi that voting for the Opposition was like putting a dagger to your neck.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is what he said and even now the Honourable Bala

HON. P.K. BALA.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... speaks in this House about how the National Federation Party (NFP) and Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) are voting together.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I will come back to him, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, yes, we are the Opposition and, yes, we work together to make this a better country.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and we are not seeing this from the Government Party and, Madam Speaker, the three of us are very happy to work with the Honourable Members of Parliament this side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Very happy.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You've got no choice, that is your only choice.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I will let them yell, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister and his Party spent the whole Election campaign demonising SODELPA and attacking the National Federation Party, perhaps this is what won them the Election but this does not make Fiji a better place, it leaves us more divided.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, it is now continuing the same vitriol and venom in this honourable House.

HON. MEMBER.- You should resign.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Government Members of Parliament have spent this debate attacking the Opposition side, demonising the SODELPA side and the new Leader of the Opposition, and I am now asking them respectfully, Madam Speaker, to stop this nonsense.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Election campaign, Madam Speaker, has left Fiji deeply divided ...

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... including on ethnic lines.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You should know better.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not reinforce this division in this place, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I want to say to them, Madam Speaker, "You are the Government, you have won the Election, be gracious, ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... be generous, ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... talk about the future."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The people want to hear about the future. They do not want to hear your personal grievances about the 1987 *Coup*; they do not want to hear about Mr. Rabuka and the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The 1987 *coup* is history ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... just as your leader in the 2006 *coup* is going to be history or has become history, ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... just as all the violence and lawlessness of 2006 is history, so talk instead about how you will build national unity.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and make Fiji a better place.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let us talk about national unity.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Talk about yourself.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, one of the Government's favourite themes is, "Security and Stability", but Security and Stability do not come from the Armed Forces.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Security and Stability, Madam Speaker, do not come from passing laws in this House.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Security and Stability do not come when the people of Fiji are not united. They come when the people of Fiji are united.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Government's performance in this debate is promoting division, not unity, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So I say again, Madam Speaker, stop demonising the Opposition side, look for ways to work together. This is what the people expect from us.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Look at what happened on Monday, Madam Speaker, there we witnessed the Government's side doing what is best.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Look at what happened on Monday, Madam Speaker. There, we witnessed the Government's side doing what is best - bullying, threatening, bulldozing its way to approving the Standing Orders. We want the Government to revisit the Standing Orders, this is so that Parliament can be more effective and perform its role properly. We want stronger Select Committees and we want Parliament to hear and debate the people's position.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is my right, or when the Public Accounts Committee to be chaired by the Opposition, this has been the rule in every Parliament until the Government changed the Standing Orders.

As usual, Madam Speaker, they have just said that the Opposition was lying. That is the only thing that the FijiFirst Party can say. They never say what we are lying about. They never offer their version of the truth. They just said that the Opposition is lying.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me come to you, Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, the Honourable Minister Bala made remarks in this House which are typical of the way the Government has been acting in this debate.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He asked me if the NFP had entered into a coalition arrangement with the SODELPA at midnight on Election night. The answer is, we did not. But why ask such a silly question? Then he accused SODELPA of being greedy for wanting the return of the 1997 Constitution. He has joined the FijiFirst Party chorus against that Constitution. They have attacked that Constitution. FijiFirst has attacked the GCC and its role in that Constitution. But Madam Speaker, let me remind the Honourable Bala of a little bit of his own personal history.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Bala is a former Mayor of Ba. He got there on NFP votes, but that is another story and at that time of the new millennium in 1999, our far-sighted Mayor...

HON. P.K. BALA.- I don't deny that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-... let us call him a "Millennium Mayor", invited a chief guest to the unveiling of a special millennium plaque. This is what the plaque said:

"This plaque was unveiled by Major-General Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, (honours listed), Chairman of GCC and former Prime Minister of Fiji, to commemorate the new millennium on 31st December, 1999. The foundation of this symbolic millennium structure was laid by His Worship, The Mayor of Ba, Coucillor Parveen Bala on 8th December, 1999."

If that was not enough, on 6th October, 2006, our Millennium Mayor was chief guest at the Fiji Day celebration held in Ba and what did he say about the 1997 Constitution and the Multi-Party Government of the day? This is what he said, and I quote:

"For the last five months, a Multi-Party Cabinet, representing all races of Fiji, has been governing the country. This concept of Government must not be allowed to fail. It allows us to embrace our shared future."

But that is not all our Millennium Mayor said, Madam Speaker. He went on and on:

"Unfortunately, irresponsible elements who now see their personal and political ambitions derailed by the Multi-Party Government are hell-bent on destroying this concept, that is the way forward for this country."

(Laughter)

He said this:

“... such elements must not be allowed to succeed. They must be told in no uncertain terms that they are living in the past. If they cannot gauge the mood of the nation, they must eat the humble pie, otherwise, they can continue their destructive ...”

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and divisive attitude ...”

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! These interjections are getting disruptive and we cannot hear the speaker. Please, be responsible with your interjections. You may continue.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, ...

HON. SPEAKER.- We will give you extra time.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, he opened his mouth and he cannot digest the reply now.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Cheap shot, cheap shot.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So what did our millennium mayor say twelve years ago about the 1997 Constitution? Madam Speaker, concept which must not be allowed to fail. A concept which allows us to embrace our shared future and now, Madam Speaker, our millennium mayor is happy to serve and sing praises of his leader, the very person who led the overthrow of that Constitution and that Multi-Party Government. This is what this man is all about.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I have this for you. I will give this to you.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister Parveen Bala and his colleagues would be blind if they cannot see that their Government now hangs in on to power by its fingernails. Their mandate in this Elections was 50.02 percent. They must be able to see that, they are already the government of the past but they are still the government.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, we ask them to use their debates, to tell the people what they will do for them in the last term of their office. You say you will study the minimum wage, give us a plan, give us your timetable to improve it because it is shameful and wrong that while you are paid \$200,000, \$300,000 in salaries while you are collecting your thousands of dollars in what might be allowances, while you are staying at fine hotels in Bonn and New York, you are leaving the poorest people in Fiji behind.

For the sugar industry, the FijiFirst Party's glossy manifesto said virtually nothing. They offered farmers a 10 percent shareholding in the bankrupt Fiji Sugar Corporation. As soon as the Elections is over, the Government calls for submission on the Sugar Industry's Strategic Plan.

For the best part of twelve years, Madam Speaker, this Government did nothing for the sugar industry and allowed it go into decline. Only when it was facing the Elections, then it began to throw money around. Still it has no vision, no plan for the sugar industry, this has been a wasted decade, Madam Speaker.

There is a new Minister for Local Government and I congratulate her, Madam Speaker, but we do not wish to hear from her about her sufferings in the 1990s. She is a Minister now, we want to hear from her as to when the Local Government elections will be held. For four years, for four years again, her predecessor, the millennium mayor, famously stalled and delayed. Why? Because he was afraid of the results, because for the FijiFirst Party, it is never about allowing the people to have their say, they know, Madam Speaker, they if they hold the Elections, they know that big billboards with 688 cannot win them the local government elections.

So, Madam Speaker, the new Honourable lady Minister, my request to her and perhaps a notice from us, make a commitment, give to the people local government and stick to it, and be unlike your predecessor, and to the rest of the Government, my question is, what will you do for the -

- farmers;
- unemployed graduates;
- health system;
- our education system;
- new industries, will you create to grow the economy; and
- what will you do about NCDs, domestic violence and suicides, talk about that?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I can understand the frustration from the millennium mayor. I can understand his frustration and that is why he is not willing to even listen.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I know where his bread is buttered, this is why he is now criticising the 1997 Constitution. I will ask the Honourable Member, Madam Speaker, to let me speak.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me speak, let me speak and finally, Madam Speaker, some advice to the Government. We know that you do not take advice very well but you must try, you must try, you must try; do not be egoistic, do not be arrogant, and you cannot be arrogant with a 0.02 percent majority.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You must now think about your place in history; think about it. Think about your place in history, will you be....

HON. MEMBER.- That's your maiden speech?

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Well, I have not got to you yet!

(Laughter)

Will you be remembered as a government that brought our nation together ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... or will you be remembered as one that deepened our national divisions ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... the government that would not listen to the people when they ask you to change your ways?

Madam Speaker, if the FijiFirst Party....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We may not be there but it is coming, it is coming.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, if the FijiFirst Party wants to continue on the road to its own self destruction, we on the Opposition side will be happy to see you go, but as the Government, it has a responsibility to work positively for the country, to build national unity and to show respect to the Opposition as the alternative government.

So, once again my plea to them is to stop the vitriolic attacks and venom and focus on the future. Thank you Madam Speaker, and may God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend Parliament as we break for refreshments and we will resume at 11.05 a.m. Thank you Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.37 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume from where we have left off and I now call upon the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua to take the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I return all the honour, glory and praise to my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has sustained me, lifted my head, given me strength and provision during this journey.

It is an honour and privilege to stand in this august Parliament, to deliver my maiden speech, knowing that my beloved parents and husband are sitting in the public gallery behind me.

I congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your reappointment and wish you good health and I also offer my congratulations to my former broadcasting colleague, the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar on her election to the position of the Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate the Honourable Members of Parliament, especially the ladies on both sides for your election to represent our people here.

The voters definitely want to see a change and I believe that behind having 10 women voted in is the hope that we will transform this Chamber into a place where we will see more inclusiveness and bipartisanship.

I acknowledge the brave and often outspoken contributions of former NFP Members of Parliament, Mr. Parmod Chand of Labasa and Mr. Prem Singh of Nadi.

Madam Speaker, I enter this House at a time when we face serious challenges as a nation; where the cost of living is high and the minimum wage low; where the classroom is one of the most stressful places to work; where seven sections of the media are either muzzled or have completely lost our trust; and where the Elections campaigning has left many polarised and bitter.

I enter this Parliament at a time when the divide between the haves and the have nots continues to widen; where threat or victimisation is a reality, preventing many individuals, communities and companies from actively and openly supporting political parties opposed to the FijiFirst Party; where returning home and contributing actively in their country is not an option for many intellectuals, academics and professionals because they dare to have views and opinions that differ from government's.

Madam Speaker, I enter this House at a time where we lecture the world on climate change but refuse to do the simplest things, to reduce carbon emissions right here at home, in fact right here in this House.

At this time last year, Madam Speaker, I decided it was high time I contributed to my country from within these walls. This was after Government announced this time last year that it was going to spend \$35,000 to welcome home our Government delegation to the COP23 meetings in Bonn, a delegation that had gone to work, earning salaries and allowances. I could not believe that this was happening less than two years after *TC Winston*, the most intense tropical cyclone in the Southern Hemisphere on record, as well as the strongest to make landfall in the Southern Hemisphere, devastated much of the country and tragically claimed 44 lives in the Western, Eastern, Central and Northern Divisions. I could not believe, Madam Speaker, that Government was prepared to spend \$35,000 on a celebration while huge parts of these same divisions still lay in ruin and many children faced the reality of beginning the new school year - January 2018 - still under tents.

So I took it to social media, Madam Speaker, asking those who agreed with me to share my *Facebook* status using the hash tag - "cancel the party", and to write to the newspapers pleading with Government to have a change of heart and to instead channel the \$35,000 to the rehabilitation of *TC Winston* victims and ensuring hospitals have basic necessities.

The result of my letter, Madam Speaker, being printed in the paper and the outcry on social media was quick:

1. There was a flurry of media statements which at first defiantly claimed that my opinion was my own and that the celebrations would continue, conveniently using the excuse that traditional protocols were important. Yes, Madam Speaker, the same traditional protocols that were shamefully set aside just last month for the traditional welcome for the Royals.
2. Blame was passed onto and I quote: "Well-meaning but naïve civil servants."
3. The party was cancelled.
4. A toned down and I hope a cheaper welcome event was decided upon.

But I had made my point, Madam Speaker, and people took notice. If this could happen with one issue, imagine the possibilities! So, Madam Speaker, I joined the fray.

After sitting the Fiji Junior Certificate Examination at Sri Vivekananda High School in Nadi, I went to Canberra to complete high school and one of the units I took was Legal Studies. This is a course that I believe we should seriously look to introducing to Year 9 students, if we want to raise civic minded citizens.

Madam Speaker, civics and citizenship education builds students' knowledge and understanding of the ways citizens can actively participate in their country's diverse society. Students learn about the civic institutions and the processes through which decisions are made for the common good of the community and they also develop the skills and understanding that relate to the organisation of a harmonious democratic society. These are the skills that will allow students to effectively participate in society and become responsible, informed and active citizens. The challenge in Fiji right now, Madam Speaker, is not that people are uneducated. The challenge is that many are educated just enough to believe what they have been told, but not educated enough to question. And here is where tyranny can reign unchecked.

The media, Madam Speaker, provides a vital role in discerning facts from fiction and reporting thereof from neutral and unbiased perspective. We assume expertise as well as a professional attitude on the part of journalists; the providers of our news. This assumption implies something that is if or even more value than expertise and professionalism, and that is trust.

In Fiji our media is either muzzled or has completely lost our trust. Misinformation matters because media outlets have great power. They shake the way we understand the world and ultimately drive our behaviour. It is no exaggeration to say that their activity can have life or death implications.

As a member of the indigenous people of this country, Madam Speaker, I am very conscious of the fact that there are only 500,000 of us on this planet, out of a population of 7.7 billion. Our language is unique to us, as are our indigenous traditions. It is only natural that when there are so few of you, the urge to preserve what can be lost is keenly felt. It is not racist therefore to want to preserve my

language and traditions. It is not racist to want to ensure that the native traditional lands and fisheries of the first people of Fiji are protected.

The Honourable Kuridrani was told to say quote and unquote when he mentioned the traditional titles of the chiefs and chiefly households that he wanted to pay tribute to yesterday because the Standing Orders prohibit Members from speaking in their mother tongue.

This must change, Madam Speaker. This is the people's House after all, so how is it that we, the people, cannot use our own languages here? These are the languages we learnt at birth. These are the languages in which we express our most intimate feelings. Why should this Parliament only be a place for people who can speak good English? How can we talk about preserving our unique languages, our many Fijian dialects, our special Fiji-Hindi, if we cannot speak those languages here?

The Parliament of New Zealand made *Te reo Maori* an official language in 1985. Members of Parliament in New Zealand can address the House in *Te reo* with the use of an interpreter. We can have translators in our courts, so why can we not have them in this Parliament?

Eventually we could move to simultaneous translation with trained translators and this is what happens everywhere else. This is the 21st century, we have technology here that can record what we say and how we vote, so it is not hard to have simultaneous translation. Good, high quality translators would not just be useful in Parliament, they could have skills and we could use them in other settings where dialogue and consultation are required.

Madam Speaker, this is not about practicalities. This is about being willing to do it, and we should do it. It is about our unity, our dignity as Fijians of all races, and our pride in our country and our culture.

On the subject of human rights, Madam Speaker, I wish to remind the Honourable Members of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, an international campaign to challenge violence against women and girls. The campaign runs every year from the 25th November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to 10th December, Human Rights Day.

Now that Fiji has been elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council, Madam Speaker, I hope that the Government will take a long hard look at the Amnesty International Report on Fiji, pointing out the need for Government to establish an independent and effective mechanism to investigate and address the systematic use of violence by the security forces and police, and to make such reports public.

I have heard in several speeches this week how the FijiFirst Government has led the way in climate change actions. Since March 2012, residents and members of the public have been lobbying Government for the protection and non-industrialisation of Draunibota Bay in Lami; home to one of the few large remaining stands of mangroves in the Suva area. Madam Speaker, an EIA submission by the proposed developers had showed major errors, proper procedures were definitely not followed.

In October, 2012, the Bay of Islands Preservation Group was formed. And what we do, is we raise awareness to save Draunibota Bay from industry and the destruction of over 36 acres of mangroves for proposed industrial development and so far, Madam Speaker, we have been successful.

In 2015, the Honourable Prime Minister stood on the shores of the Draunibota Bay and released 7,000 young mud crabs. He gave a speech and this is what he said, I quote:

“Nothing is more important to every Fijian than the preservation of our environment and especially those living things on which we all depend for food and for making a living. So I am especially delighted to be here today to celebrate a wonderful event - the release of 7,000 baby mud crabs into the wild to help repopulate the mangroves of Draunibota Bay.”

But in that same month, Madam Speaker, April 2015, the land in Draunibota Bay was rezoned to allow commercial building, heavy industry and car parking.

In May 2015, we appealed against the rezoning to the then Minister for Environment with a petition signed by 560 people. Then another developer bought the site, fenced it and cleared it of mangroves.

Two years after we lodged our appeal, Madam Speaker, in May 2017, the then Minister for Environment, the Honourable Parveen Bala disallowed our appeal. Now, approval has been given to build a paint factory on the rezoned land; a paint factory, Madam Speaker, right next to mangroves.

Madam Speaker, did you know that if you want a copy of an Environmental Impact Assessment report, one must pay \$4.85 per page? Some EIA Reports have hundreds of pages, Madam Speaker, but you cannot get a soft copy emailed to you, nor can you go and photocopy the report yourself. So being able to challenge changes to our environment is a costly exercise and yet, the people who are most affected by development are often the poorest of people. What will Government do to improve this?

The saga surrounding the destruction of the cloud forest in Wainisavulevu Weir by Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) is another example of how carelessly we view sustainable development, where inadequate public consultations are the norm, where there is a disconnect between the overseas preaching and local action. There were even attempts to hide the truth, Madam Speaker.

Now, let us come closer to home, or shall I say, work. How many single used PET bottles does this House go through each day, each week? I reckon that during one working day, more than 100 single- used plastic bottles for this Chamber alone, multiply that by five days, Madam Speaker, and you have a lot of plastic bottles.

I would like to invite this House to please consider phasing out single-used plastic bottles. Our parliamentary offices have filtered water dispensers which are a blessing. So why cannot all of us Honourable Members consider bringing our own reusable water bottles from home and filling them up at the dispensers, or God forbid, why can we not just drink plain tap water like most of the people who voted us into this House? As one of our sayings from Kadavu goes, Madam Speaker, and I quote: “*Mai ya so.*” I myself use a reusable water bottle with the filter that I change every two months or so, depending on tap water quality.

Secondly, we sure do go through a lot of paper in this House, Madam Speaker, and since we MPs are being supplied with smart phones and laptops, I hope we can use a little bit less paper in our communications.

Thirdly, is the air-polluting habit of Government four-wheel drive vehicles waiting for their honourable passengers, no matter the duration of their meetings or meals, with both engine and air conditioning running. May I urge Honourable Members to consider asking their drivers to cease this practice for the sake of cleaner air, your health and environment.

Madam Speaker, there is a young lady called AnnMary Raduva who has already made a name for herself as a young environmental activist. AnnMary, with the help of her family has started a campaign called “Say No to Balloon Releasing”. AnnMary has written a letter to the Honourable

Prime Minister, in the hope that the Government, along with stakeholders classify releasing balloons into the air as littering.

AnnMary started her campaign after watching a balloon release recently to celebrate the launch of *Walesi*, and after watching a *YouTube* video with her sister which showed turtles and sea birds dying from swallowing plastics and pieces of balloons.

Madam Speaker, AnnMary is only 14 years old, and is a Year 9 student of Adi Cakobau School. And she deserves our credit and assistance to not only see her project succeed, but to promote her as an activist.

On equality, Madam Speaker, I would like to respectfully ask the Honourable Minister for Education to please, look urgently at levelling the playing field in regards, education resourcing in the maritime and rural areas, so that the children of Kadavu, for example, can compete more strongly with their peers in urban centres. This would be a huge step towards true equality.

The Honourable Koroilavesau on Tuesday said his information was that transportation and shipping had never been better because of the franchise shipping system. I do not know how many times the Honourable Minister travels as an everyday citizen because while this is true in terms of regularity for us, islanders, I invite him to travel like I do, like my parents often do and like most of us islanders do, in vessels that are dangerously overcrowded, where passengers outnumber life jackets, if you can find them, and where there are no safety announcements. I, in fact, would like to invite all the Honourable Ministers to attempt maritime travel, like the majority of this country travels, Madam Speaker.

To quote leadership Guru, John C. Maxwell, Madam Speaker, and I quote: "Everything rises and falls on leadership."

I believe that this is the same when it comes to a country; when the leadership is fair, compassionate and when the leadership leads with love first and foremost, you see that reflected in its citizens. Having watched the interjections, the aping and other behaviour on show in this House over the last four years, I cannot help but be reminded of a school-yard bully and the obligatory gurgle of buddies, always jostling for an approving pat on their backs.

Just about everyone I speak to, Madam Speaker, hopes that we will be better behaved over the next four years. And that, Madam Speaker, I believe should be easy to do, if we keep in mind always who put us here and why, and who pays our salaries.

In my first few days in Parliament, Madam Speaker, I see, hear and feel the might of the Government side, and hear of how they are the only ones who have or are capable of the many great things quoted endlessly.

The Honourable Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, said in his speech on Tuesday, 27th November, 2018, and I quote from Page 14 of the *Daily Hansard*:

"I am here to listen to you and take your concerns seriously. And I am here to build a better future for all Fijians, wherever they may be in the country."

Well, Madam Speaker, we on this side of the floor represent 49.6 percent of the Fijians that the Honourable Prime Minister was talking about. So please, I ask the other side of the House take the concerns of that 49.6 percent of Fijians seriously when we highlight them in this House. Any

Government must remain transparent and answerable to the public at all times, and a good Opposition should put the spotlight on serious issues and have them resolved quickly, Madam Speaker.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank some people. To each of you who believed in me enough to entrust me with your vote, I thank you. I will do my utmost to be worthy of the honour and privilege of representing you in Parliament.

I thank the leadership of the National Federation Party, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, Vice-President, Executives and Selection Committee Members for deeming me worthy to represent my Party, NFP.

To fellow NFP candidates, we fought a good, clean, issues-based fight without resorting to personal attacks and vitriol. We all should hold our heads high.

Madam Speaker, I have nothing but gratitude for the NFP staff and youth. Their energy, positivity and good vibes and tonnes of knowledge continue to be invaluable.

I am grateful also to all NFP supporters - blue collar, white collar, no collar, in the factories, offices and on the streets, who campaigned for me with or without my knowledge at home and abroad. They are the machinery that drives this push to be that positive change in Fiji we so desperately needs.

Thank you - to my close family from Dravuni, Buliya and Navoka, who are the people I relied on the most to get my message out. My two *tavale* - Tamai Oveti in Lomaivuna, Tamai Sala in Navoka and my brothers - Semi Sarasau in Bulia, Jolame Koroivuya in Dravuni, Sailosi Vunidakua in Sakoca.

I also thank my Bulou Tavvu, Titilia, from the chiefly village of Tavualevu for her energy and passion. To the amazing team of young people who are my poling agents, I am so grateful. Thank you mum and dad, Poasa, Ana-Lisa, Zac and Em, I could not have gone on this journey without your support from day one.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka*.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- There are those who kept me in their prayers, Madam Speaker, from within my church family and from without, and I thank them for their prayer and support.

There are many I will not thank publicly because they risked their jobs and income to support me, a sad reality in today's Fiji, but I am so grateful to you all. I promise that I will do all that I can to be a good servant. And I leave us with this reading from *Jeremiah 9: 23-24*:

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteous on the earth. For in these things, I delight,’ says the Lord.”

Vinaka saka vaka levu, Madam Speaker, बहुत धन्यवाद, fai'aksia, xie xie, shukria.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Members of Cabinet, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow Parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, and all those listening or viewing the Parliamentary session, I rise to respond to His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Fiji Island's Address in opening the first session of this august House on Monday, 26th November, 2018.

Madam Speaker, may I join the young Honourable Members of Parliament in congratulating your re-election as Speaker of this august House and the Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, on Monday 26th November, 2018. On a personal note, Madam Speaker, we the women members who came after you at Adi Cakobau School (ACS) are also especially proud of your achievements.

Madam Speaker, ACS has continued to nurture and train young Fijian leaders who have excelled in positions of leadership in our beloved Fiji, whether it be at the echelon of Government, the private sector or serving as *Radini Vanua*, *Radini Talatala* or businesswomen or chief executives of their own homes, rearing the next generation and managing their families, finances and wellbeing; we are proud to continue the trend set by our pioneers, who entered the gates of ACS on 1st October, 1948.

It is, indeed, encouraging to see that our Speaker and Deputy Speaker are both women, and I warmly congratulate you both on being elected to these positions. I look forward to see you perform your duties with honour, without fear, favour or ill-will, to be a credit to your families, and to the women and all the people of Fiji.

With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, may I also congratulate all the Honourable Members of the House on their election to this august House. I also offer a warm congratulations to all the women Members of this honourable House. A historic number of us have now joined the benches of this, the highest court of the land, trusted with a legislative and law-making authority of our beloved nation.

I seek your further indulgence, Madam Speaker, to thank sincerely the chiefs and people of Tailevu North and voters in other parts of Fiji for their trust in me to represent them in this august House.

Madam Speaker, I stand on the shoulders of giants. My late father had encouraged me to take up accounting, despite my personal wish to pursue a career in science. His instruction that I begin my service at the Tailevu Provincial Office, where I put into practice the values I was taught at home, to serve people diligently without fear or favour.

Of his nine children, I was encouraged to pursue a career in the Fijian Administration, to ensure the protection of the *Vanua* which is, their resources and the people. This has been my life long vocation.

My father's elder brother, my Ratu Levu was one of the first sons of Verata to receive secondary education, Madam Speaker. The *vanua* of Verata, her sons and daughters were late comers to the field of education such that my father encouraged the chiefs and people of Verata that Verata's only remaining battle is to educate our children to contribute not only to nation building but more importantly to improve the quality of the lives of our people.

I was educated at schools where my Ratu Levu had taught, at Namalata District School in Tailevu North and Lawaki District School where I had passed my Intermediate Examination and pursued my secondary education at Adi Cakobau School. Both my father and Ratu Levu and late uncles in the chiefly houses of Verata had inspired me to serve the people of our *vanua*, the province of Tailevu and the *vanua o Viti*.

I also pay tribute to my brothers and sisters who paved the way and from whom I learnt that leadership is a position of service to the people.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the chiefs and the people of the *vanua* of Tailevu North, *Na Vualiku kei Tailevu* who had endorsed my candidacy and opportunity to serve this august House. I wish to state their titles and I quote:

1. *Vanua o Namena, Nawainovo na Ratu ni Tui Wainovo;*
2. *Nasautoka, Turaga Sau ni Vunivalu;*
3. *Vanua o Taivugalei, Burerua na Turaga na Vunivalu;*
4. *Vanua o Wailotua, Wailevu na Turaga na Tui Wailevu;*
5. *Vanua o Sawakasa, Nadereivalu na Turaga na Ratu;*
6. *Vanua o Vugalei, Vunisalevu na Turaga na Vunivalu;*
7. *Vanua o Dawasamu, Dawasamu na Turaga na Ratu;*
8. *Vanua o Naloto, Naloto na Turaga na Tui Naloto;*
9. *Vanua o Nayavu, Bau na Roko Tui Bau;*
10. *Vanua o Nailega, Naduadua na Turaga na Vunivalu;*
11. *Vanua o Namalata, Waimarolevulevu na Turaga na Ratu;* and last but not the least
12. *Na vanua o Verata, Naisanokonoko na Turaga Bale O Koya na Ratu.*

Madam Speaker, I also wish to add the names of my loyal campaign members:

1. Ratu Rasari Kovutanavanua, President of SODELPA Tailevu North Constituency;
2. Maciu Seniucudromo, *Qase ni Vale*, Naiviloa;
3. Osea Vutikalulu, Naveicovatu of Naloto, Wainibuka;
4. Ratu Inoke Rokotuinamata of Namulomulo, Tailevu;
5. Jese Raicebe of Sote, Tailevu;
6. Peni of Naivacula, *vasu i Burerua*, Tailevu; and last but not the least,
7. Viliame Rasea, *Qase ni Vale* of Gonesau Clan, Navunimono.

They were my warriors. They worked hard, given that there were eight sons and one daughter of Tailevu North courting the vote of the 12,000 in Tailevu North in this General Election.

Madam Speaker, it is a great injustice that as native Fijians, we cannot speak in our mother tongue in this august House. Neither can the Member of any other ethnic community speak their mother tongue. We are all required to speak in English. It is unprecedented and totalitarian and I doubt if this rule exists in any other Parliament in the world over.

Hindi and Fijian, or *vosa vaka Viti* are recognised as official languages in our Constitutions. Yet, despite the much talked about economic growth, increased GDP this Parliament cannot afford translators as previous Parliaments did. It is my view that the social re-engineering experiment that in Year Zero 2006, according to the learned Attorney-General will not work despite all the Decrees promulgated to enforce it, entrenched in a Constitution Decree, promulgated without the participation of the people of Fiji.

Be that as it may, Madam Speaker, SODELPA stands for the rule of law and will continue to abide by the rule of law. We will continue to stand up for the rights of all the people of Fiji against such draconian and unjust laws.

I wish at this point, Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, to pay tribute and recognise contributions, the sacrifices and leadership of our former leaders. As an official of the *matanitu iTaukei*,

the Fijian administration, I served under all the Prime Ministers from the late *Na Turaga Bale, Na Tui Nayau, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Dr. Bavadra, Major-General Rabuka, Mr. Chaudhary* and the deposed Prime Minister *Laisenia Qarase*.

My first Minister was the late Ratu William Toganivalu, a great chief and leader of Tailevu and I am forever indebted to him and later Ministers including the *Na Turaga Bale na Vunivalu, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu David Toganivalu, Ratu Meli Vesikula, Ratu Josua Toganivalu, Ratu Timoci Vesikula, Major-General Rabuka, Mr. Qarase* and *Turaga Bale* and *Tui Cakau, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu*. They had all reinforced the principles of servant leadership and that the wellbeing of the *iTaukei* is the wellbeing of the people of Fiji.

Our former leaders would be horrified to learn of the changes that have been made without consultation, in actual fact all the people of Fiji. Many laws have been imposed over the last 12 years without consultation, including the 2013 Constitution. Measures were imposed that limited the rights of all religious bodies in 2009 to 2013. There is a basic principle of democracy to hear the voice of the people on changes that affect their daily lives.

Madam Speaker, Indigenous Fijians have a specific right to be consulted and to give their free, prior, informed consent to changes that affect their institutions, their resources, their land as a distinct indigenous group. Their rights under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ILO Treaty under Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169).

My colleagues have given detailed contribution on the many laws and decrees imposed since 2006 that marginalised indigenous institutions and our right to manage our land and resources. I wish to focus today, Madam Speaker, on just one, the Land Use Decree specifically on Section 15 which breaches the right of indigenous land-owning groups to challenge decisions under that Decree. Section 15 in brief states and I quote:

“(1) No court, tribunal, commission or any other adjudicating body shall have the jurisdiction to accept, hear, determine or in any other way entertain any proceeding, claim, challenge or dispute by any person or body which seeks or propose to challenge or question” – any provisions of this Decree.

I submit, Madam Speaker, that this is a breach of the so-called equality claimed by the FijiFirst.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- It is clear that the Decree champions the interest of the investors only. I ask, “Who is expected to champion the rights of those who wish to question the provisions of this Decree?”

Turning now to His Excellency the President's Address, I will respond to the assertion of transparency and accountability in the 2018 General Elections, Madam Speaker. As the General Secretary of the Social Democratic Liberal Party, I was in a position to experience directly the obstacles and draconian restrictions in the Electoral Decree 2014.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and SODELPA Party Leader, former Prime Minister, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka and the SODELPA Members of Parliament are here in this Parliament to represent not only those who voted for us, but also the interest of all the people of Fiji. We are here without prejudice to our legal rights to redress regarding the 2018 General Elections.

Madam Speaker, only about 72 percent of registered voters casted their votes in this election compared to 84 percent in 2014. That is about 172,258 people who did not vote in the recent election compared to about 91,000 in 2014. To-date, the Fiji Elections Office has not explained why so many voters were wrongly allocated and how many of these voters tried to vote but were denied. The pre-poll or early voting which began seven days before the election, there is a lower voter turnout rate of about 63 percent with only about 44,000 voters casting their votes while about 25,000 did not vote or were not able to vote. That is over one-third of the pre-poll voters who did not vote.

Madam Speaker, the final voter roll was only given to political parties on 7th November, 2018; two days after the pre-poll started on 5th November, 2018. From the roll we see that hundreds were wrongly registered, for example, voters in Moala, Nadi were not allowed to vote because they were registered in Moala, Lau. Similar stories from voters in Narewa, Navosa in the roll in Narewa, Nadi, voters from Lami town registered to vote in Lamiti in Gau.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Someone with knowledge about Fiji would not make such a basic mistake, Madam Speaker. These are the basic mistakes which should not happen and I would say criminally negligent.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- This was not the voter's fault. They correctly registered to vote as is their right yet the Elections office put them to stations with similar names, where they lived because as we know, many places in Fiji have the same name so this was not the voter's fault.

Madam Speaker, there are many other anomalies in the election results and the numbers released by the Elections Office do not make sense. SODELPA's increase its share of votes and increased its seats to 21 in 2018 from 15 seats in 2014 despite the bias and unfairness of the Electoral Decree. The unfair processes despite the difficult environment in which the political parties other than the FijiFirst Party operates, despite the restrictions and despite the discouragement of political participation over the last 12 years where politics and politicians became a dirty word.

Despite the difficult legal and political environment, SODELPA gained six seats. For this, Madam Speaker, we can only thank our Almighty Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ because a human and ordinary assessment of our scant financial resources and the restrictions we operate under, would say logically, that what SODELPA has attained in this elections is impossible.

For that, Madam Speaker, I beg your indulgence to sincerely thank the thousands of volunteers who came forward as polling agents, as party workers, as members of the campaign teams because they believed in SODELPA's collective vision, and our promise of servant leadership, of leadership that listens. You overcame fear, overcame oppressive laws, the oppressive political environment and threats. You came forward with the courage of your convictions to walk the talk and to serve the people and our future generations. To you all, I say *vinaka vakalevu*, may God bless you all. The journey is not over, keep the faith and let us soldier on!

Madam Speaker, I now turn to our role as Opposition. At the outset, Madam Speaker, I acknowledge that the role of this august House as a whole includes the scrutiny and oversight of the actions of the Executive arm of the State, the Government. As a member of the loyal Opposition of the Republic of Fiji, I undertake to:

- contribute to the scrutiny of, and suggestion for improvements to legislation and budget proposals;
- the examination of expenditure and public accounts;
- to seek information on and clarification of government policy;
- to appraise Government administration;
- to articulate the grievances of our population; and
- to examine delegated legislations.

This is also the role of Government backbenchers in the interest of the people of Fiji, in order that Parliament is not merely a rubberstamp for Government actions.

Secondly Madam Speaker, our role as members of the loyal Opposition, is not only one of criticism but, at times, to offer agreement, assistance or improvements to the actions and policies of the Government in the interest of the people and the nation.

On this note, Governments must not question the loyalty of those who express dissent, or question Government policies and Bills. We remain citizens of the same State and servants of the same laws under the Constitution.

As has been said, Madam Speaker, dissent is the most loyal form of patriotism. Freedom of speech in our beloved Fiji is limited under various Decrees promulgated since 2006. What we have seen, Madam Speaker, in the 2018 Elections, after twelve years, is that the people have expressed their votes, that they cannot continue to labour on or live under repressive laws. The election result shows a big swing away from the ruling FijiFirst Party which gained only a 50.02 percent majority. That means about 49.08 percent of the population voted for parties in the Opposition to the FijiFirst Party.

Madam Speaker, democracy is the battle of ideas, political parties give the people a choice, and that choice expressed at the polls decides the Government. But even after elections, the people must continue to be heard. May I emphasise that even after elections, the Government must continue to listen to the voice of the people.

When dealing with the affairs of the Government of the nation, if there is injustice or wastage of resources, the people of Fiji who pay the taxes of elected officials and public servants have the right and an opinion and to express that opinion.

Just about 50.02 percent of voters are said to have voted for the FijiFirst Party, Madam Speaker. They have not given up their right to be heard and to express their views, especially to laws and policies that negatively affect them, for the whole of the four-year term of Government.

Madam Speaker, I wish to express my misgivings about His Excellency the President's omission of the 2006 *coup d'etat*, which the Fiji Court of Appeal in 2009 declared unlawful and unconstitutional, leading to the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution. It is common knowledge and a matter of public record the names of those citizens who were killed in State custody unlawfully after the 2006 *coup*:

- Nimilote Verebasaga,
- Sakiusa Rabaka,
- Josefa Baleiloa,
- Iowane Benedito,
- Tevita Malasebe; and
- Viliame Soko .

The passage of time does not blunt the injustice. The imposition of immunity in the imposed 2013 Constitution leaves the cry of their families unheard. These deaths in custody, the continued documented incidents of torture, the recent death of Josua Laulauvaki in custody, contribute to the atmosphere of fear in Fiji.

I now wish to respond to the comments of the Government Whip, Honourable Alvick Maharaj on our Party Leader, Honourable Major-General Rabuka. Madam Speaker, the diatribe by the Honourable Whip against the Honourable Leader of Opposition, our Party Leader for SODELPA, cannot and should not go unchallenged. The Leader of Opposition, Honourable Major-General Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka is a decorated statesman in this country: a former Prime Minister, a former Commander for the Fiji Military Forces, the first neutral Chairperson of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*, Chairperson of the Cakaudrove Provincial Council, a renowned mediator recognised by the Commonwealth and held so many other responsibilities.

The issue, Madam Speaker, is that some have a myopic view of history and unable to rise above petty personal political interest. Many are quick to talk about 1987 but fail to acknowledge that the Opposition Leader, Honourable Rabuka, returned executive power to the President for the installation of a civilian government only six months after the events of 14th May, 1987. He did not hold on to power and pay himself and his interim Cabinet secret salaries.

It is pertinent, Madam Speaker, to remind our people that the decision of the Court of Appeal 2009, continues pending implementation. The Opposition Leader led the rescue of the NBF (National Bank of Fiji) whose loss we have recovered. I also wish to point out the loss of the 2006 *coup* of \$200 million from the New Zealand Aid for the resettlement of informal settlements and €350 million Euros for the Alternative Livelihood Programme.

The 2013 Constitution was imposed in this nation. In contrast, the 1997 Constitution was truly the “will of the people” and described as the best constitution in the world.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I sincerely hope that we can work together for the betterment of all our people, by cooperating across the aisle, in committees, as that is the essence of democracy.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the Opposition Sitiveni Rabuka to take the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA:- Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister (I hope he is listening in), Honourable Members of Cabinet, Honourable fellow Parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen in the gallery, fellow Fijians: I rise to respond to the Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji in opening the first Session of this House on Monday, 26th November, 2018.

Madam Speaker, please, give me this opportunity to address the nation and give my views on the 2018 Elections before I respond to His Excellency's Address. Citizens who chose to exercise their rights to vote, Madam Speaker, have spoken. They have decided on who they want to be their government for the next four years. I congratulate the Prime Minister, Honourable Ratu Voreqe Bainimarama for winning the Elections.

I must also acknowledge the increase in the number of women participating in the national decision-making at the highest level in this august House. During my time, only two women were

Members of Parliament: one of them became my Deputy Prime Minister; and the second was a Cabinet Minister throughout her term. It is encouraging to experience the progress that we have made thus far in ensuring the effective participation of women in all aspects of national leadership.

I am also proud, Madam Speaker, that I opened the door to recruit women in to the Fiji Military Forces when I was Commander, and one of the very first recruited is a very senior member of the RFMF now completing her course in a very prestigious Military College in Australia. She graduates tomorrow and I congratulate her and I also congratulate her husband, one of the Senior Ministers of the FijiFirst Government.

(Applause)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- The FijiFirst Government has been elected to run the nation for the next four years. The margin is not as high as they would have liked for those who cast the valid vote but I agree with Honourable Members who have said in this honourable House that a 'win is a win', no matter what the margin.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I add my words of praise to our national rugby team for their win against France, one of the great rugby nations of the world. As a former national rugby player and Vice-Captain in my last test in 1977 and a Trustee of the Fiji Rugby Union, I say that I am very proud and I am sure all Fijians are very proud of our Team's performance. I acknowledge the presence at the gallery of one of those that toured England with me in 1970, Madam Speaker. I thank all voters who voted respectively for me and for SODELPA. I apologise to some of our voters, particularly those in Cakaudrove, Vanua Levu because I was prevented from visiting them by ongoing police and court commitments.

In spite of that they still have faith and trust in me and in SODELPA and I thank them most sincerely for their support and I hope that they will continue to pray for us and the Party as we move forward. I would like to assure them that we will continue to do our best and push and promote our cause in trying to build unity by working together in co-operation with Government through effective debate and sharing the truth in this august House.

I solemnly believe also, Madam Speaker, that the low voter turnout emanate from the difficult political environment faced by the voters to freely make their democratic choice because of the number of legislations in place that undermine true democracy.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Nonsense.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- These laws limit political parties opportunities to dialogue with the public and resulted in a media that is fearful during the Writ period.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Same laws in 2014.

Madam Speaker, section 115 of that particular law limits voter education awareness by civil society organisations. Voters are more confident and responsive to civil society outreach programmes rather than the outreach programme put on by the political parties.

I believe that if civil society organisations were given the opportunity and the support to provide good awareness programmes, our citizens would be better informed of their safety responsibilities and their rights to vote without fear.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to inform the people of Fiji that even though SODELPA and our fellow Opposition Party, the National Federation Party (NFP) are sitting here, we do so without prejudice to our right to file a petition in the Court of Disputed Returns, regarding the 2018 General Elections processes and results within the time allowed by law.

I assure the nation that SODELPA will follow the rule of law in the processes to be undertaken by our legal team in the Courts, and to our supporters, I urge calm and restraint, we will follow the rule of law.

I congratulate my Honourable colleagues on the Opposition side of this honourable House for our joint result of the NFP and SODELPA efforts.

For the National Federation Party to retain the number of seats that they won in 2014, and for SODELPA to gain six more seats are no mean feats when seen in the true context of fighting the Elections against a formidable political group that had dominated public life and attention in our nation successively for 12 years, further enhanced by our Prime Minister's international profile afforded by Fiji's Presidency of the Climate Change Conference of Parties, a world effort to mitigate effects of Climate Change and Global Warming that the Government Coalition of SVT and GVP, with me as Prime Minister took Fiji to with the late Honourable Kaukimoce's participation in the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1993.

To all our supporters and those who voted for me spread right across our nation and out to the international community of Fijians I say, "Thank you all very much, I commit myself to serving you for the rest of my life."

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote.

Madam Speaker, I have known His Excellency since 1966 when he was a School Cadet NCO in Natabua, and I was in the Queen Victoria School Cadet Unit. He joined the Army one year ahead of me, he as a Private in 1967 and I as an Officer Cadet in 1968. We then served together until I left the Army in 1991 after my recommendation for him to be my successor was overruled by Government.

He was one of my Company Commanders when I was Battalion Commander in the Fiji Battalion serving as part of the United Nations Interim Forces (UNIFIL) in Lebanon from 1980 to 1981 (some might not have been born at that time) during the most volatile years of peacekeeping operations there.

His Company performed excellently in very dangerous situations with high risks to lives with him showing exemplary conduct and courage. For his role, Madam Speaker, and his command, I recommended him for the award by Her Majesty, the Queen Elizabeth of the prestigious Military Cross for Bravery. One of the then Major Konrote's soldiers also received the newly instituted Queen's Gallantry Medal. That soldier, Corporal Navutovuto, is now retired and lives in his village in Wainibuka, Tailevu North.

My second Company Commander, whom I also recommended for the same award of the Military Cross, and who received it in the Queen's Honours List in 1981 and became a Commander, Brigadier (Ret'd) Ratu Epeli Ganilau, whose very loyal and loving wife of 44 years, Adi Ateca Moceiwaqa Mara Ganilau was buried in the chiefly burial grounds of Vuniduva of the chiefly *Ai Sokula* family of Lalagavesi. May her soul rest in peace, and may the peace of God be upon her family.

Madam Speaker, I will be failing in my duty to all Fijian voters, as Leader of the Opposition, where the two Opposition Parties represent more than (this morning I heard 49 percent), I worked out

47 percent of the votes cast if I do not respond to His Excellency's Address with honesty, sincerity and conviction, based on the truth and the current political, socio-economic realities on the ground.

Madam Speaker, I take seriously the oath I made on Monday, 26th November, 2018 to defend the rule of law and the rights of the people and to act with integrity and diligence in carrying out my responsibilities and I make this response to His Excellency the President's Address in the spirit of that oath. I consider as well that Parliament is the highest court of the land, given its law-making powers, which include overruling the Judiciary.

Therefore, I solemnly confirm that I will do justice to all the people without fear, favour or ill-will, the same commitment of the oath made by our judicial officers, and this is consistent with my own motto of, "doing good to all with malice towards none".

Against this backdrop, Madam Speaker, I am humbled and touched by His Excellency's plea that, I quote:

"We must aspire to have a Fiji that is stronger, more vibrant and prosperous, and a people who remain united, committed to a common purpose and filled with true love for all their fellow Fijians and their nation".

I sincerely believe and I am committed to a united, vibrant and prosperous Fiji where all the different communities can live together in peace and harmony. Madam Speaker, actions speak louder than words and we must all walk the talk rather than just saying rosy words without any action for dialogue, understanding or mutual respect for one another.

Madam, Speaker, earlier in the day, before His Excellency opened our Parliamentary session, just after we were sworn in as Members in this august Chamber, we then considered the Standing Orders published and gazetted in March 2017. All I did after that, Madam Speaker, was to request for this august Chamber to consider amending the Standing Orders, to allow the people of Fiji to present petitions that were done freely since Independence, instead of it being curtailed by the imposition of a certain percentage that limited the ability of the Opposition.

The people were denied the hearing of their petitions by the undemocratic rule at the time in the Standing Orders that petitions require 40 percent of the Members of Parliament to approve the referral of it to the Standing Committee. Previously all petitions were referred to the Standing Committee automatically, but we have witnessed so many petitions that have met their demise on the floor of this Parliament by force of numbers in your Government. A feature of democratic governance that I am hoping can be improved on during our term in this august Parliament. I pray that Government would not amend the Standing Order to deny almost half the voting population of our country by increasing the threshold votes to 50 percent of the Members of Parliament just to disqualify the 47 percent represented on this side of the Chamber.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Give us ideas.

(Laughter)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Do not do it.

I would like to assure the nation that Opposition parties are here to work with Government, so that the people of Fiji get the best out of this august Parliament rather than just more confrontation. We will continue to hold the Government accountable, as it is the duty of the loyal Opposition and offer the people a view of the alternative government.

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the first ever Chair of the Public Accounts Committee during my time as Prime Minister and the father of the Honourable Attorney-General.

Madam Speaker, some Honourable Members on this side of Parliament have expressed reservations about what they perceive as selective references to the *coups* in Fiji - in 1987, 2000 and 2006 in His Excellency's Address.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency reminded us of the events of 1987 and 2000, where on both occasions, a democratically elected government was removed at the point of a gun. However, we heard nothing of the events of 2006, where a democratically elected government was also removed by the Military Commander himself, now our Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I spoke at length about my personal relationship with His Excellency during our time in the Fiji Military Forces. In 1987, Madam Speaker, he was my Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander. We worked very hard together to maintain calm and restore order in a country hurting with race feelings. I commend the senior officers and officers and all ranks of the Forces at the time who maintained stability and order before entrusting the governance of our nation to our first President, His Excellency the late Ratu Sir Penaia Kanatabatu Ganilau, himself a very distinguished chief, soldier and statesman.

His Excellency, General Konrote, did not want to cover up the *coup* of 1987, because it was a *coup* and was against the law but he, like the rest of the officers and men (there were no women in the Army at the time then) at the Fiji Military Forces was instrumental in the restoration of order and transition back to civilian rule under the Interim Government. And the formulation of an enabling Constitution of 1990 to return Fiji to Parliament in 1992, for the review by the people in their Assembly, beginning in 1994 and ending with the enacting of the 1997 Constitution (Amendment) Act of 25th July, 1997; exactly seven years after the decreed promulgation of the 1990 Constitution, as specifically stipulated in that Constitution, Madam Speaker.

In 2000, General Konrote was Permanent Secretary responsible for the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). Again, he was involved in efforts to maintain law and order after George Speight's *coup* attempt in May. Madam Speaker, he had to mention that *coup* because it again brought to the surface of our everyday life in Fiji, the fragile state of our interracial co-existence.

He was still Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs and Defence when the mutiny happened in December of 2000. He saw for the first time the unthinkable degradation of military life when comrades killed each other. As a retired military officer, who was promoted by the Soqosoqo Vakavulewa Ni Taukei (SVT), General Voters Party (GVP) Coalition Government to the rank of Major-General to take up the post of Force Commander of United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), he would have been devastated. He was highly decorated as a peacekeeper, keeping warring factions apart in a war that had torn Lebanon to shreds and enclaves based on religious lines against the interest of the simple peace-loving indigenous Lebanese.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency did not mention those killed in 2000, leaving it to us, Honourable Members of this august assembly to work our way to finding out how best to deal with the aftermath of group intolerance.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency General Konrote did not mention the *coup* of 2006 which was carried out by the then commander and now our Prime Minister because His Excellency the President was a victim. He was forcibly removed as an Assistant Minister in Prime Minister Qarase's

Government and true to his character as a leader, he does not continue to complain and moan as many would naturally do.

With his totally different and opposing experiences in the *coups* of 1987, 2000 and 2006, His Excellency, the President of Fiji, a great servant of Fiji and the world as a decorated soldier, United Forces Commander, diplomat, permanent secretary and minister, has taken this opportunity while the two leaders of the *coups* of 1987 and 2006 are on opposite sides of this Chamber and all Fijians, he is calling on all of us to work together for real peace, stability, prosperity and a truly democratically enacted Constitution based on true reconciliation, restorative justice and genuine goodwill. There will be no need for handouts as people will be encouraged to be self-sufficient in food production, employment creation, real social responsibility workers, family-based human resource developers at homes and God fearing citizens, free to worship in our free land or collectively, recreating our Fiji as a way the world should be.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA. Correct!

Madam Speaker, I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister to accept my offer as Leader of the loyal Opposition of the Parliament of Fiji. The two of us as *coup* leaders of 1987 and 2006 respectively to work together and give back to the people of Fiji, the Fijians, a country they can all be proud of, a land of hope and glory to endure whatever before. May God bless Fiji for evermore.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to take the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. At the onset, I must thank His Excellency the President for his inaugural Address at the Opening of this new Parliamentary term. Generally, the speech outlined a lot of Government's intentions and aspirations for the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I will speak on a number of those issues later in my address, but for now, I wish to join my other colleagues in congratulating you graciously on your re-appointment as Speaker of this august Parliament. I also take this time to congratulate the Fiji Team in beating the France Team in the last test last weekend. I also take this time to congratulate all the 51 Members who successfully contested in the General Elections and are now Honourable Members of this august Chamber. I look forward to working with you all in performing our roles as elected Members of Parliament.

Let me begin by acknowledging that the recent conducted 2018 General Elections has been closely fought Elections. Whilst I relied on the hard work that I made in the last four years and my dedication to speak the truth, I submit that it was only through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that I am able to stand before this august Chamber for a second term as a successful politician.

Madam Speaker, some of our colleagues from this side of the Chamber unfortunately and sadly are not here today. I attribute that not to their lack of hard work but to what I perceive as an unfair voting system that is still new and is yet to be fully understood by our people.

For the Naitasiri province, there is a reduction of the representatives we had in 2014, when we had two MPs from both sides of the Chamber, now from SODELPA, I return the lone MP and the other side now has Honourable Vijendra Prakash who is also from Waidravo. I lay the responsibility of these losses on the system and the ineffective public awareness of voting patterns.

Personally, I will miss the former Honourable Ro Kini Kiliraki, a hard working dedicated and loyal MP and comrade, and an outstanding son of Naitasiri. Likewise, I will miss the likes of former Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata, Semesa Karavaki, Mere Samisoni and Ratu Isoa Tikoca, whom I wish to also thank them today for their comradeship and many contributions to Fiji and to SOLDEPA.

Madam Speaker, in reference to His Excellency's Address on elections issues, the conduct of free and fair Elections is at the heart of any democratic process, but when an election is conducted in a non-inclusive way, it leads to the loss of confidence of the results, escalates structural disparities and inequalities, which at times leads to civil unrest. Therefore, it is important to conduct a free, fair and credible election. However, what are the characteristics of a credible election? Although there is no standard definition of a credible election, there are some aspects of a credible election. The first and foremost feature of a credible election is that, it must reflect the will of the people.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government. This shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote and by equivalent free voting procedures.

The complicated voter registration process adopted by Fiji meant that 30,000 voting citizens were turned away from pre poll. These hindrances were due to wrong polling venues. To assume everyone has a mobile, and can check 1500 for their correct venue, leave alone having access to mobile networks from certain interior areas, is preposterous.

Madam Speaker, what the Government should have done in addressing these problems is to open up the polling stations restrictions and allow voters to vote from any polling station nearest to them, as long as they produce their voter ID cards. The voting system is supposed to be people friendly and not draconian.

On another note, was voting really secret and free? No it was not. For example, the Commander RFMF had earlier stated that soldiers were free to vote from wherever they wished and for whom they wanted to vote for. Almost all of them registered to vote near to their residential homes, however on the eleventh hour, they were directed to instead cast their votes from their respective army camps. Similar practices were applied to the Fiji Police Forces and the Fiji Corrections Service. If, Madam Speaker, the defence forces were expected to provide security on Election day, why were they not encouraged to engage in postal voting, to protect the secrecy of their vote and allow them to exercise their freewill?

We all know what has now happened. Already, if what is reported in the dailies is correct, the Honourable Prime Minister has taken a pot shot at prison officers at the recent pass-out parade of new recruits, where he alluded to the allegiance of prison officers during the traditional presentations.

Madam Speaker, the other side of the House may deny it and the Multinational Observers can also deny it, but we on this side of the House and the equal majority of the people of this nation know that this Election voting system was compromised because it allowed for so many discrepancies. How else do you explain 30,000 registered voters, people not voting in pre-poll areas which we all know are blue ribbon seats for SODELPA?

Madam Speaker, because of the system that was adopted, many people were robbed of their rights to exercise their civic duty to elect a government of their choice.

Madam Speaker, it must also be noted that another global benchmark for a credible election is the acceptable voter turnout. The total number of voters eligible to vote in the 2018 General Elections

was 637,527 and approximately 459,000 cast their votes. If over 35 percent of voters could not exercise their duty to vote, we are saying that this Election does not fully reflect the will of the people, with barely a half of our total population having engaged in the Election process. Also when voter turnout across polling stations is between 53 percent to 61 percent, it gives a sure sign of a democracy not working to its fullest potential.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, let me just point out that not all is lost, however, it is now very clear that the FijiFirst Party is in its last days. In 2014, despite seven years of dictatorship rule and showering people with all sorts of developments, SODELPA still won 15 seats. Now, four years after return to Parliamentary rule, in the 2018 General Election, we have increased our seats by six to reach 21. I personally have no doubts that with the increasing trend of seats, SODELPA will thrash FijiFirst Party with a resounding General Election victory in 2022. Yes, we can and yes we will! Get ready Honourable Members to change sides in four years' time, if not earlier.

Madam Speaker, on His Excellency's remarks of positive outlook by the MOG on our 2018 Elections; globally, an overemphasis by Observers on Election Day has been noted which often leads to the production of overly favourable assessments of election processes. In many cases the mechanical aspect of the voting is reasonably fair but the pre-election period is plagued by numerous problems, such as obstacles for the registration of certain candidates, unequal access to the media, and the governing Party's use of State resources to finance its campaign.

The Russian Presidential Election in June 1996 exemplified this pattern. In general, the dozens of observer groups that collectively fielded well over a thousand foreign observers on Election Day issued ringing endorsements of the process, highlighting the lack of apparent fraud or widespread administrative problems with the voting.

The fact that Boris Yeltsin's campaign almost certainly used significant State resources for its own purposes, benefitted greatly from biased coverage on State television, paid journalists to write favourable stories and used various other stratagems to ensure Yeltsin's victory received relatively little attention from the foreign observers.

In Fiji's case, we can definitely draw close analogies. For example, we never had an Interim Government as is the convention, instead, we all know that the FijiFirst Party ran into Election still very much handing out last-minute vote buying freebies.

Madam Speaker, no *coup* is a good *coup*. I note the selective commentary by His Excellency when he spoke about the 1987 and 2000 *coups*, without addressing similarly the 2006 *coup* that the leader of the Fiji First Party has earlier referred to as being a radical intervention. Whether you call it a clean-up campaign or a radical intervention, fundamentally *coups* involve undermining the rule of law and use of arbitrary powers in the pursuit of political gain. Giving a *coup* another innovative name does not change what it is. People can now decide to do a better *coup*, if they so wish to say, "The *coup* of the past was a good *coup* but needs an improvement. Very dangerous indeed!

Madam Speaker, His Excellency spoke about the treacherous lies that was imposed on our people by way of the 1987 and 2000 *coups* whereby acts of brutal force and violence, coupled with a political culture of fear, mistrust and communal antagonism. Let me just say this and remind this august House that in December 2011, on the eve of five years since the 2006 *coup*, a joint letter signed by Human Rights Watch, International Trade Union Confederation, International Federation of Journalists and Front Line Defenders asked the interim government to stop, and I quote:

“The ongoing interim serious human rights violation in Fiji and realise the promises that your government made to United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2010.”

The letter also alleged that,

“... four people are reported to have died in military or police custody and several people have been intimidated, beaten, sexually assaulted, or subjected to degrading treatment.”

Madam Speaker, we all know that the recent Election has placed this once great nation of ours on a very dangerous precipice. We are now more racially polarized than ever before.

Thanks to the FEO Apps, we can now easily confirm that 97 percent of villages and urban centres where indigenous people live and voted, are unhappy with the current FijiFirst Government. One thing that is certain is that, if FijiFirst Party continues to underestimate the intelligence of our people and ignore the hurt, a bulk of our population, especially the *iTaukei* people, Fiji is looking at more trouble in times ahead. We have to be pragmatic. For FijiFirst Party, at present, their popularity is based on their Leader. We all know that no man is immortal.

The FijiFirst Party needs to look at the interests of their voters and what becomes of them in the future when inevitable natural attrition occurs. We urge Government to be cautious of this fact, come to the middle ground and work with the majority of our people who are unhappy.

They can begin to do that by showing us the elected representatives of these unhappy citizens, respect and acknowledgement that we can assist to make Fiji great again.

Madam Speaker, I just have a general comment on the economy. There was an initiative on Student Commercial Agriculture Scholarship for two years in 2016. There are 15 students who should be graduating next week on 6th December with Certificate III. They have been informed by the Fiji National University (FNU) that they cannot graduate unless they pay \$916 per student.

The package included a farm house, tractor, 100 acres of land, farm tools and implements and start-up capital of \$2000. How can Government in the last, say that the programme is supposed to be partially paid by the students upon an inquiry of their missing names from the graduation roll?

I urge the respective Ministries – the Honourable Minister for Economy and the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to look into this matter and stop hoodwinking our young people.

And for the Honourable Minister for Sports and his Assistant, the people of Naitasiri are still waiting for the Vunidawa Sports Complex. Maybe this time, you will take the initiative to complete the project.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency stated that no land has been alienated in the 2013 Constitution and it provides sound protection. These sentiments were echoed by the Honourable Prime Minister. The Honourable Koroilavesau on the same subject spoke about the oaths we swore in this House to be honest and truthful.

Let me then say that I am utterly frustrated and disappointed, angry, in fact, because I know that these assurances are misleading. I do not know if the Honourable Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs in his capacity as Prime Minister understands what is going on under his Government and under the *iTaukei* Lands Trust Board.

I would just like to follow the Honourable Koroilavesau. This is the article in the *Fiji Times* of the Tui Vitogo in Vitogo, Lautoka, still awaiting answers on the 700 acres of land being sold without their consent.

Madam Speaker, on a similar situation, a widow with a valid lease title and up-to-date payment suddenly found excavation of gravel occurring on her land by a company. Various communications with iTLTB in which I became involved, confirmed that her lease was subdivided without her consent. Imagine a recent widow to encounter this kind of treatment. This confirms moral corruption.

Similarly a landowning unit of Soniwaqa Subdivision at Nakasi, today cry foul over the extension and granting of lease over their land without their consent. This landowning unit had been to the Honourable Prime Minister's Office many times without satisfaction.

Madam Speaker on that note, SODELPA's position that customary land is not safe is further confirmed by the declaration that a new independent Land Tribunal will be legislated soon. If there was indeed no land alienation and the 2013 Constitution strongly protects land like never before, then why the need for such a tribunal? Actions, indeed, speak louder than words, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in this new Parliament term, just as we experienced in the last four years, Government expects to introduce new legislations through parliamentary engagement.

On the registration of accountants, it took eight long years for the Government to eventually bring to the fore what the Honourable Prime Minister had earlier announced in 2010, that Government would review and establish a new independent establishment as Independent Financial Auditing Services Commission (IFASC) to oversee the registration and issuing of certificate for practicing accountants, in line with the new companies Act. I trust this will open opportunities for Chartered Accountants to become Public Practicing Accountants.

Madam Speaker, let me also say that there are some laws that do not appear on His Excellency's notable legislations for review and inclusion. One of this notable legislation is the Village By-Laws that the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs has shelved due to popular resistance. May I urge Government not to shelve this law, but to terminate it totally.

Our people will not accept being controlled and manipulated. As it is, Government is now appointing *Turaga ni Koro* and *Mata ni Tikina*, as well as Chairpersons of Provincial Councils, yet villagers are asked to fork out the cost of running Provincial Offices through fundraising.

Madam Speaker, Government needs to stop hoodwinking our indigenous population and grant them the respect and recognition they deserve. Allow them equitable participation and enjoyment of their resources, and encourage them to become equal partners in development. Provide the financial capital to start with.

We must allow our landowners to participate in a 50:50 investment participation, so we can see the same kind of success stories, such as the Pearl Resort whereby PNG nationals can afford to invest elsewhere around the world because they have the capital to do so. Anything less will continue to build in them antagonism and distrust towards everything perceived to be of harm, even if well intended.

On another note Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Attorney-General confirm that it is now a requirement for any land to be developed outside of the village boundary, approval needs to be sought from local municipal councils?

Madam Speaker, as the Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, once again, I intend to speak and advocate on this very important Ministry extensively in the four years to come, as I have done this in the past four years. For now, however, I am finalising my long list of requests which will be landing on the respective line Minister's table shortly. I know the good Honourable Jone Usamate will be accommodating these requests from my office, just as his predecessor had been.

I end, Madam Speaker, by taking this time to thank some very important people for their support during this last four years, and the recent strenuous and nail biting campaigns.

Firstly to my very able, and hardworking wife, Sainiana Radrodro. You remain my backbone and the reason why I am able to do what I do. I thank you sincerely for your selfless love and commitment of which I am extremely blessed.

I take this time to acknowledge in particular my campaign team namely; *Nau Tamai* Ratu Peni, *Tamai* Noa, kinsmen of Serea Village, Inosi of Roma Village and Kato of Nadovu Village.

To my campaign support staff - Ratu Emosi Matanababa, Tevita Seru, Josia Murikanaka; I could not ask for a more dedicated and loyal team. I owe you all always and pray for your success in all you endeavours.

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 na i 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. *Vanua o Rara , Naqaranikula, Turaga na Vunivalu;*
9. *Vanua o Nabaitavo, Burenitu, Turaga na Vunivalu;*
10. *Turaga na i Liuliu ni Bose Vanua ena yasana o Naitasiri, Turaga na Roko Tui Waimaro;*
11. *Turaga na i Taukei Burelevu;*
12. *Turaga Taukei Waimaro; and*
13. *Turaga na i Taukei Matada;*

Special gratitude and thanks to the villages of Naqara, Taulevu, Matailobau, Nabena, Delaitoga, Waidracia, Naluwai, Lutu - Wainibuka, Nawaisomo, Nakorovatu, Naqelewai, Savusavu, Udu, Laselevu, Nasiriti, Roma, Nasoqo, Rewasau and Delaitoga.

A special thanks also to my close relatives who are in the gallery today. Though I am your lone representative from the Opposition benches, I pledge to do all I can within my powers to maintain the high level of service you have come to expect of us on this side of the House.

To my supporters in Koronivia, especially the *Turaga Vukevuke ni Qaselevu Vakacegu* and his family and their loving church congregation and those in Lokia, to the *Turaga na i Taukei Nakaria* and my Yako voters in Nadroga, my friends and supporters in Vadrayawa, Lautoka, likewise in Moala Village, Nadi.

Much gratitude likewise to my fellow QVS Old Boys and ACS Old Girls.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, at this point, we will suspend our proceedings for lunch. Please, note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members at the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members, please note that the Medical Team from the Ministry of Health is set up on Level 2 to undertake medical check-ups. Please, make use of their services. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.33 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will proceed from where we left off and I now call upon the Honourable Salote Radrodro to take the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members, firstly I thank God Almighty and His Son Jesus Christ for the gift of life, His abundant blessings and especially this opportunity to be here again in Parliament for a second term.

Madam Speaker, I join previous speakers in congratulating you for your re-appointment and also your Deputy, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, and we look forward to you upholding this House the high standards that the people of Fiji demand and likewise we on this side of the House look forward to a more enabling environment for effective debates.

I am also happy to note the steady increase in the number of women in this House, and congratulations to the 10 Members of women Parliament and I look forward to working with you all in championing issues to boost the development and empowerment of women.

Madam Speaker, I also acknowledge and thank my Party, SODELPA for the confidence it has placed in me, in particular I extend a big *vinaka vakalevu* to the Party President, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu and to the Party Leader, who is also the Leader of Opposition, Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka for their leadership and tremendous efforts during election campaign that resulted in the shift of the six seats from that side to this side.

Madam Speaker, in this journey our families make the greatest commitment and sacrifice and for that I thank my best friend and husband, Kitione, who has been my greatest practical support. To my sons - Viliame, Nia and Pate with your dear families, thank you for the many sacrifices you have made on my behalf. And to my seven little heartbeats, thank you for the love and laughter which has kept me grounded, especially when the going gets tough.

I also thank my sister, Meme, for joining me in Fiji during Election time; my brother, Anare, for running the campaign team in Vanuabalavu; Tia and Seini, even though you were abroad your support was always timing.

I also pay tribute to my late parents for the upbringing built on strong Christian principles and my early childhood days spent in Tacilevu, Bouma, Tukavesi, Buretu and Noco where my *Ta* taught as a primary school teacher. I also acknowledge my teachers at Adi Cakobau School, the early sisterhood formed at Sawani and later the old girls network that has had a strong influence to what I am today. A special thank you to my classmates and especially those overseas - Kesa, Tuina, Harietta and Elenoa.

Madam Speaker, I got my seat back in Parliament with a lot of help from various people and I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the following; my families in Mualevu, Vanuabalavu, Yacata, Bua and those overseas. My church family – *Tabacakacaka* Tacirua, Delai Valelevu, Kalabu, *Wasewase* Naitasiri, Kinoya, Makoi and the Christian Mission Fellowship Community. The Nasinu Constituency team lead by Sitiveni Weleilakeba, *Liuliu ni Yavusa* Kalabu and *Radini*, Isikeli Raibeve and the Tacirua/Kalabu campaign team, the 20 Polling Venues Co-ordinators in Wainivula, Caubati Housing, Caubati AOG, Shree Maruti Kindergarten, CMF Primary School, Kinoya Methodist Church Kindergarten, Assemblies of God High School, Bishop Kempthorne, Tacirua Primary School, Tamavua Primary School, Colo-i-Suva Forestry Training Station, Sakoca, Sailo, Naveiwakau SDA Church, Delaitokatoka, Veikoba, Delainasole HART and Wainibuku HART and all the 220 party agent

volunteers who came out willingly, giving their support and services and worked tirelessly on election day.

The ladies in the Flea Market, thank you for your support. A special thank you to Asena and Iliana and I will always treasure and value your sacrifices and commitment and all those individuals who supported my fundraising activities and those who I may have missed, *vinaka vakalevu* for all your assistance and support. To all the 2,235 people who voted me into this House, thank you most sincerely and I will do my best to confidently carry your voice. Thank you all for your prayers, you have indeed help me find my political values and dream.

Madam Speaker, my I also thank His Excellency the President for his Address in opening this new Parliamentary session on Monday, 26th November, 2018 gave us a lot of food for thought.

May I respond to some of the issues. On Election, Madam Speaker, it has been said that the 2018 Elections was free and fair, but this is far from the truth because of the following - the Electoral Act is not voter friendly, for example, old people had problems remembering the number of the candidate they would like to vote for and there was public transport problems.

Madam Speaker, I was also advised by some concerned citizens and members of the disciplined force who undertook postal ballot that they were told to write their names at the back of their ballot papers. Madam Speaker, also this morning some women reached out to me, women relatives of Prison Officers raising their concerns that this morning there has been communication made to their husbands. Prison Officers had been given a form, a directive from the Commissioner of the Corrections Service stating that they have to fill in the forms their names and the name of the party that they had voted for.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, I had said that and if they are disputing it then I am requesting the Honourable Minister responsible to investigate and bring a report into this House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order! You are mentioning the Commissioner of the Corrections Service and he is not here to defend himself. I would rather have you withdraw that statement.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Are you withdrawing the statement?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I withdraw.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- But, Madam Speaker, I would request and I would plead to His Excellency the President that these issues be investigated.

Madam Speaker, the campaign field had been very uneven because the electoral process does not specify any financial ceiling for each candidate to campaign with and as demonstrated by the FijiFirst Party with those huge billboards that continuously appear overnight and public rallies due to its strong financial backing and in the process, Madam Speaker, other parties had been pushed aside with a lot of disadvantage. For example, in the FijiFirst Party radio advertisement and I wish it could be played here, played now and then we will see the difference that SODELPA and NFP campaigned on policies and principles while their radio advertisement gravitates more towards fuelling unwarranted animosity.

Madam Speaker, with reference to Parliamentary sittings and I quote: "That the business of this Chamber is the business of all Fijians wherever they may be", again, Madam Speaker, this is far from the truth due to the following reasons. The Standing Orders does not allow us to speak in our mother tongue, it does not allow us to speak in the vernaculars and I say this out of concern because more than 50 percent of my voters understand the proceedings of this House much, much better in the vernacular and also, Madam Speaker, this is a breach of my human right.

Madam Speaker, to effectively participate in this House requires good preparation but that is a big problem right now due to the limited space in the Opposition Office and I ask the Honourable Attorney-General where is the improved office space that he has been promising for the last four years. And in this House, I know we cannot call anyone a liar, but what do we call these Ministers who make false promises?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Very poor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, you did not conduct the Local Government Elections, you promised that.

(Laughter)

So, what do we call you?

Madam Speaker, to make real progress in our Parliamentary democracy in this House we must bring back the original 2014 version of the Standing Orders which allows for people's voices to be properly heard. For example, through petitions being referred to Standing Committees and whereby people's concerns are addressed and their priorities aligned and can become Government priority in the developmental agenda.

Madam Speaker, I am responsible for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and also the Ministry of Civil Service, and may I comment briefly on these two portfolios.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Very soon.

I acknowledge the efforts by the Ministry in addressing Elimination of Violence Against Women and right now the Observation of the 16 Days of Activism. But, Madam Speaker, despite the legislation, the policies, the programmes in place, violence against women and children continue to rise and I call on the Government to do much more to counter this nagging issue, and in this regard, I urge Government to establish a Commission of Inquiry on the elimination of violence against women and children. I also call on all Honourable Members on both sides of the House to unite and support this proposal.

Madam Speaker, let me add some comments on the Civil Service. Being a former career civil servant, it sadness me to witness the way the civil servants are being badly treated now, for example, the:

1. short term contracts (mostly ranging from 3 months to 3 years) creates low work morale and lack of job security;
2. 55 years retirement age further contributes to unemployment;

3. huge salary gap between the Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries and below is simply pay-discrimination;
4. high presence of expatriates as Permanent Secretaries which takes away job from our very own very well-qualified people.

Madam Speaker, the Civil Service Reform in the last four years has only managed to present the 2015 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, therefore the Government has failed to provide any written records to substantiate the Civil Service Reform success that it has been claiming.

Madam Speaker, these are some of the things that civil servants care about and I urge Government to seriously look into them otherwise these work conditions create a very bleak future for civil servants and Fiji as a whole. May I add that just this morning I was contacted by some teachers, who said that they have been told that they will sign their work contract in January and their salary will be reduced from what they are currently receiving now. Madam Speaker, I will ask the Honourable Minister to look into that, please.

Madam Speaker, may I highlight some issues from the constituencies. The Government claims that there is a high economic growth, and I quote:

“We see that prosperity in the record nine straight years that our economy has grown and tens of thousands new jobs have been created.”

Madam Speaker, unemployment is one of the pertinent problems in the urban Nasinu, Nausori corridor and to say that unemployment is decreasing is very misleading. For example, during the campaign in Kinoya, a young lady in there who was a recipient of the TELS scholarship had graduated from the University of the South Pacific with a Bachelor of Environmental Science, and on that graduation day, she was also given a letter on the payment of her student loan, which was amounting to about \$20,000.

After that she was unable to find a job but she was lucky enough that she secured a scholarship and she went back and did Post-Graduate Diploma Programme. She has just completed two programmes but still unable to find a job. Another young lady in Lakena HART where single mothers and single fathers with their children stay, and this HART is administered by a faith-based group.

A young lady in the HART graduated with a Diploma in Fisheries and she is still unable to find a job, and I am looking across to these Honourable Ministers on the other side telling us that there is employment, and I will challenge the Honourable Minister for Fisheries and the Honourable Minister for Environment, if I could refer these two ladies to you and if you can secure them jobs. They are very well qualified.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, when those that have formal qualifications cannot find a job we can only imagine the huge number of unemployed school leavers. I highlighted that because they have finished their education under your TELS Programme and they still have not found employment. Therefore, Madam Speaker, may I request the Government side to stop talking about reduction in unemployment and talk about new employment policies and programmes that will create jobs for graduates and youths. You must note that the \$1,000 and all these CARE Programmes that were dished out like no one's business on the eve of Election was just a vote-buying exercise and even in doing so, still with six seats moved this side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- That \$1,000 is grossly insufficient to set-up a viable small business and is also a counter-productive strategy in building a better Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we heard that the YES Programme had been a successful programme but they failed to mention any statistics or budget to substantiate their claim.

Madam Speaker, let me share the FNPF story to shed more light on unemployment and the subsequent financial burden that will have to be addressed by this Government, and future Governments which is us on this side. Of the 429,936 members, 71 percent with below \$10,000 savings and only 29 percent have balances over \$10,000. These can be due to irregular employment, low income and employers paying the minimum wage of \$2.68.

Madam Speaker, a lot has been said about free transport, but free transport can only be true to the children of Savutalele, Veikoba, Rokara Road communities in Kalabu, and I ask the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, when will these roads, which were constructed by previous Governments, be expanded to allow the bus services to reach them otherwise these children will always be left behind.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Assistant Minister said a lot about infrastructure development yesterday. Go and visit the Veikoba Bridge and the Vesida HART Bridge and make sure that it is upgraded otherwise the school children are very much at risk when there is heavy raining.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, two and half years after *Tropical Cyclone Winston*, the Yacata District School and the Avea District School still have not been completed in the construction works, and I really urge and request the Honourable Minister for Education to look into this.

Madam Speaker, in the Nasinu/Nausori corridor, a big problem there is the waste management. The Honourable Minister did not conduct the Local Government election as promised and this could be a reason for these problems in the Municipal Council. I am looking into the new Honourable Minister to, please, make sure that you conduct the Local Government election as compared to your predecessor who only said things that he will do but he did not do it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, a lot too has been said about the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS). Let me clarify in this House, I, as the former Director for Training, administered the scholarship system under the Public Service Commission, and the TELS that they are talking about now is a loan scheme and the way they are saying it is like a scholarship. The only scholarship that they have now is the Toppers Scholarship. The Toppers Scholarship is a full scholarship whereas the TELS scholarship they have to pay back every cent.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish all of us a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and also to all in Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Simione Rasova to take the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji joining us today through televised broadcast and online via our greatest medium *Facebook*; I rise here today as a proud son of Kadavu to deliver my maiden speech and to contribute to the debate before the House on the Address of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to take the moment to acknowledge my Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, through which all things are possible. I thank the Lord for granting me the strength and the patience to endure the last 12 years and everything that has led me to this point in history.

I would also like to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment to the Speaker of this House, and I wish you all the best of luck in the execution of your sacred duties, especially in regards to the overseeing of the rambunctious and passionate Honourable colleagues lining the benches of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, the depth of experience and confidence of the Opposition benches is mostly a reflection of the vision of the leadership of the Opposition Leader, the Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka, whom I am honoured to call my leader. I only wish my Natumuan kai, Tanya Waqanika, and her booming voice could have joined the House as Deputy Speaker without prejudice, current Deputy Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I beg your indulgence as I take the moment to thank my 3,286 voters, a majority of whom sacrificed a working day to cast their pre-poll ballots to circle "551". I would also like to thank my biggest supporter, my beautiful wife, Sereana Rasova, and my two children - Veidovi and Veiwili Rasova.

Madam Speaker, in the spirit of bipartisanship and as the Honourable Attorney-General had pointed out rather empathetically, I shall, to the best of my ability, use the Queen's English without the Fijian Affairs' consent in giving my quote, like the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani which he wrote yesterday while wishing to thank the *vanua* but I tried as much as possible to put it in English. I quote:

- i) "*Vinaka vakalevu na Turaga na Tui Nacolase, vua na Turaga na Tui Tavuki*", and in English, "Thank you to the land of the coral grass, the King of Twist";
- ii) "*Vakaturaga ki na Koroisoso vua na Turaga na Tui Naceva*", in English, "Thank you to the Lord of muddy village, king of the South";
- iii) "*Nabala vua na Turaga na Tui Nakasa*", in English, "Thank you, King of the *Yaqona* sprouts."
- iv) "*Valesasa vua na Turaga na Tui Nabukelevu*", in English, "Thank you to the king of plants foundation that lives in the house of the broomstick".

Now, Madam Speaker, if anyone laughed at the futility of my attempt to translate this into English, I would have to reluctantly agree. There are some things that can only be expressed in Fijian that capture and portray the deep honour, and the respect of those titles must be accorded.

So with your permission, I would like to withdraw my earlier attempts in trying to renaming those esteemed titles in English and without prejudice and disrespect to the *vanua*, I would like to begin again, and can you give me the time, please. I would like to thank the:

- i) *Vanua* of Kadavu, *Vanua Vakaturaga o Nacolase, vua na Turaga na Tui Tavuki*;
- ii) *Koro-i-Soso, vua na Turaga na Tui Naceva*;
- iii) *Nabala, vua na Turaga na Tui Nakasa*;
- iv) *Vale Sasa, vua na Turaga na Tui Nabukelevu*;
- v) *Naivibati, vua na Turaga na Tui Yale*;
- vi) *Vale Daidaiga, vua na Turaga na Tui Yawe*;
- vii) *Ki na noqu vanua i Koro-i-Vabea, vua na Marama na Tui Vabea na Tui Ono*;
- viii) *Manusa, vua na Turaga na Tui Ravitaki*;
- ix) *Nawaimalua, vua na Turaga na Tui Drue*;

for their blessings and guidance in endorsing my candidature today.

Madam Speaker, just as His Excellency Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote has implored us to work together in bipartisan unity, I pledge to work alongside Government during my four-year tenure to uplift the quality of life and improve the economic standards of living of the people of Kadavu and Fiji.

I was born in that village of Lawaki in Kadavu, in the Tikina o Nakasaleka, in the province of Kadavu. My birthright or *Vola ni Kawa Bula* to the *vanua Vakaturaga o Naturu, vua na Turaga na Rokovaka*. As a proud son of Naturu, Madam Speaker, please, allow me to quickly highlight the various issues affecting my home island of Kadavu.

On road improvements, I would like to thank the Government for the latest road improvements in Kadavu, from Vunisea to Nabukelevu-i-Ra, Vunisea via Richmond Methodist School and to the completion of the road from the *Tikina o Yawe* from Nalotu, all the way to Lomati, Nabukelevu.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for initiating the construction of a road from Kavala Bay in Naleca to Vunisea. The people of Kadavu have really appreciated it, unfortunately, we are hoping that this road would then join the existing road from Vunisea to Namara but in the last 12 years, the road has only reached Koroijoma in October this year. Without prejudice to the Honourable Prime Minister, we would humbly like to request that he approves further developments on the road from his village of love, Namajiu, to merge with the existing road development from Koroijoma and the people of Naceva and Nakasaleka would greatly appreciate this gesture.

We also need a jetty in Nabukelevu-i-Ra and Daku, Naceva, Kadavu to ease the transportation costs and save travel times. These government developments are already in place by various governments and need attention and action by the present government and the sooner the better.

I would like to address communications in Kadavu, Madam Speaker. After *TC Keni* on 10th April, 2018, our wireless communication network has not been fully restored. We need urgent repairs and maintenance to get it back to 100 percent coverage. This is a burning issue and needs prompt action.

While still on telecommunications, Madam Speaker, the people of Kadavu, when I asked them yesterday as to what they wanted, they mentioned that they also want *Walesi TV* services and connection to be above par with the rest of Fiji and more so to keep themselves updated of current affairs and weather news.

On Health Centres, Kadavu is requesting for the maintenance and upgrading of infrastructure in relation to the health centres and nursing stations located in the province.

On *yaqona*, Madam Speaker, we are thankful to the Kadavu Provincial Council for the formation of the Kadavu Kava Association, in partnership with Government, to boost the kava industry in the province and enhance their income and improve their lifestyle. The nine *tikina* have collected their levies and are waiting for the Government to provide its share to get the initiative off the ground. We would also like to implore Government to initiate development of farm roads to all over Kadavu.

Madam Speaker, given the land and labour as well as the need to empower the people of Kadavu in terms of agricultural development, I would like to impress the idea of Government taking the lead under the auspices of its much publicized Green Revolution, to enable the farmers to get engaged with diversifying the other agricultural commodities apart from *yaqona*, *dalo*, *tavioka* and fishing or may be coffee for alternatives. This will again bring back the question of price stability and market security.

With regards to sports in Kadavu, I must thank the Honourable Prime Minister for and on behalf of the people of Kadavu for initiating the development of a Rugby Stadium at Vunisea but the project needs completion and probably needs his intervention. On the same note, Madam Speaker, we will appreciate if the Government can develop two more stadiums, one on each islands, one in Kavala and one in Nabukelevu-i-Ra, given the travel.

The issue of business licence in Kadavu, Madam Speaker, is a hindrance to small and medium businesses. As it stands, in order for canteen owners to operate their stores, they need to pay a licence fee of \$22 and issue the licenses for each product sold, including cigarettes and other products that altogether total about \$300.

Now in order to apply for, they have to travel all the way to Suva, get it vetted, spend two nights and travel back to Vunisea to see the Public Administrator who will then issue the licence. If the Minister in charge could kindly look into these requests to empower the officials in Vunisea to travel around Kadavu and approve licences, thus saving prospective small business owners the burden of travelling to Suva, spending about \$400 and more.

Lastly, on Kadavu, Madam Speaker, this Chamber may be aware of the *marijuana* issue in the Kadavu Province and in other parts of Fiji. The Kadavu people do not condone this illegal activity and are gravely concerned about how it has tarnished image. That being so and coupled with the harsh punishments meted out by the courts, I am of the view that state authorities need to make the people to seriously become aware of substance abuse and the penalties they carry.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for having faith and confidence in appointing me as the Shadow Minister for Fisheries, Honourable Koroilavesau. I inherit this position from former Honourable Ro Kiniviliame Kiliraki to whom I am grateful for championing the causes of the fisheries and forestry sector.

Madam Speaker, I was expecting to hear about the policies and programmes of the Ministry of Fisheries when the Honourable Minister for Fisheries spoke two days ago but his speech leaves much to be desired and I am thankful that we will be working together for the next four years not only for Kadavu but the whole of Fiji.

On an average, Madam Speaker, we are told that every person consumes 64 kg of fish per year making it a staple diet for our people, more so, that we are an island nation and those living in the rural and remote areas have limited sources for protein.

In addition to that, the nominal contribution the fisheries sector makes to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is offset by the fact that the fisheries sector continues to create meaningful jobs and enterprise while seeking to make our fisheries sector competitive and to meet the demands of the export market.

Madam Speaker, the current and future issues faced by the fisheries sector will need the collective action and will of the Government, the resource owners, stakeholders in the fisheries sector on those fishing importing our fish can be summed up as follows:

- Protection of the sacred fishing grounds of the resource owners;
- Reviewing the *i qoliqoli* legislation to return the control and management of their fishing rights;
- Conservation of fishing grounds and setting aside sites as fish hatcheries (thank you to the Honourable Minister for Fisheries) in Matasawalevu, Kadavu;
- Patrolling illegal fishing in Fiji waters by modern day pirates;
- Price stability and market security for Fiji fish and fish products;
- Revival of PAFCO and other local fishing companies; and
- Government assistance for aquaculture farming.

Madam Speaker, in addition to my above portfolio as the Shadow Minister for Fisheries, I am the Assistant Shadow Minister for Youth and Sports to Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, to make a brief contribution on youth affairs and sports.

Noting that Fiji now is a young nation in terms of our definition for youth age and given the analysis of our population pyramid, given in this Parliament, Madam Speaker, let us note that:

- Substance abuse;
- NCD cases in young and middle age;
- Poverty of access and denial of opportunity;
- Lack of productivity citizenry; and
- Absence of youth leadership at all levels of decision making.

The above are some of the challenges faced by our youths in addition to employment opportunities, getting entrapped in the debt burden and the effects of climate change and environment exploitations. That being so, Madam Speaker, we in the Opposition acknowledge the fact that our previous and present Governments have taken steps to empower our youth and seek to resolve youth issues under the auspices of:

- Duke of Edinburgh Award;
- Student Exchange Programme;
- Youth Volunteer Scheme;
- National Employment Centre;
- National Youth Council;
- National Youth Band; and
- Registered Youth Clubs.

However, how many of these youth benefit from these initiatives remains a bigger question. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the problems and potentials, challenges and opportunities for

youth in a holistic context. This means aligning our national policies and plans in par with regional and international goals, for example, arts and sports are one of the highest paying vocations in the world, but I fail to understand why we are not allowing our youth to excel in these areas which means more income for them, their families and the nation.

Madam Speaker, speaking on sports as a uniting force, an avenue for entertainment, good food and longevity as well as a revenue and fame earner for the athletes, sporting bodies and the nation, I would humbly urge the Government to consider taking the following steps in this sphere in consultation with the stakeholders:

- Enactment of a code for Sports Administration and Discipline Mechanism;
- Reviewing the substance abuse legislation incorporating anti-doping measures;
- Community awareness on substance abuse and penalties on farming and dealing with legal herbal drug, such as *marijuana*;
- Preparation of national teams for regional and international competitions as highlighted by the Honourable Gavoka;
- Development of national database of athletes and sports officials like FRU is doing today;
- Developing the necessary infrastructure to host regional and international events;
- Establishment of National Sports Insurance Scheme; and
- Setting up an aftercare fund for the welfare of retired and disabled athletes.

Madam Speaker, should you be able to address these issues in time to come, it will lead in increased sporting activities which will mean good health and long life for our people, more revenue and fame, better opportunities to unite and excel as stronger nation.

My heartfelt thanks goes to my campaign group, Team Kadavu 551, my SODELPA President in Kadavu, Ratu Sailasa Matea; my campaign Director, Namaku and his family; IT campaign Manager, Joni Raiyawa (sitting in the public gallery), my son Manueli Taletawa from Vukavu Naceva, my son - Veiwili Rasova and my fibre captain and brother Samisoni Rasova; our polling agents, counting agents; volunteers in all 76 polling stations, I thank them and the supporters for their sheer hard work and sacrifice leading to my election to this Parliament.

A very special thank you to the 2,882 who were from the Eastern Division in Kadavu, 266 from the Central in Raiwaqa and Suva areas, 49 from the Western Division, 15 from the Northern Division and 74 postal ballots from Australia, New Zealand and United States.

I also wish to thank the study of Men's health advocates of Prostate Cancer, Suva Golden Oldies Rugby Club. I wish them well in their tour of Manila and Hong Kong in March and April of this year, in which I wish to go, I think we are sitting on that weekend I will write.

I would like also to thank the Rasova families of Black House in Raiwaqa, the Waqairawai families, the Baravilala families, the Raiwaqa Methodist Church; the Raiwaqa Rugby & Basketball supporters; the Raiwaqa classmates and friends and families in the Mua i Ra kei Viti, I wish to repay your faith in me by pushing for the upgrade of our footpaths and streets in Raiwaqa like Davui Lane, Derrick Street, Browning Street, Milverton Road and all the streets in Raiwaqa which needs upgrading.

I wish to thank my Rasova families here in Fiji in the Western Division and also in California in USA, London in UK, Brisbane, Mt. Isa, Sydney and Melbourne in Australia, New Zealand and to all my Indian voters nationwide. They have voted for me, thank you for supporting me.

I wish to thank the *Taukei* Tamavua and his families for personally introducing me into politics, *vinaka vakalevu* Ratu.

Thanking my former employees of both Fiji Air and Air Fiji since 1983 to 2000. I also wish to thank a lady from Lagalevu, Ms. Aggie O'Connor, who financed and also supported Team Kadavu everywhere we went around Kadavu. And I also convey my congratulations to another Lagalevu sitting there, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor - thank you *Kai*.

I join my parliamentary colleagues to say *vinaka vakalevu* to my party, the Social Democratic Liberal Party for fielding me as a candidate in 2014. I did not reach here and I made it again in 2018 and I thank the Leader of SODELPA for making it possible for me to end up here. Thank you Madam.

I was not so lucky in 2014 but my unwavering commitment to my people and my party paid me a handsome dividend in 2018. That is the reward of loyalty to our people and for preserving a standard of ideologies and political principles in life.

It is indeed a privilege for me to be in the Chamber with the Kadavu free birds, if I may use that terminology, to signify the record the Kadavu spirit with my fellow colleagues, the Opposition Whip, Honourable Lynda Tabuya and Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. And when I look to the other side, there is Honourable Koroilavesau and also Honourable O'Connor, also from Kadavu. We also look forward to forming a lobby with them for the development of Kadavu and in championing the Kadavu pride in and outside this Chamber.

I also acknowledge that you, Madam Speaker, are from Ono and we hear the *Marama* from Ono and Jale Anare. We are also supporting your appointment, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, I wish to associate myself with all the Honourable Members of this Chamber to plead with the leaders and the people of this nation to shun from their personal and political differences aside and now that the Elections is over, come together and engage in a meaningful dialogue and consensus building on national issues.

There is a lot of work to be done to liberate our people from the bondage of over-regulation and over-taxation to make Fiji free again. Let us begin by reconciliation, tolerance and unity and I do not have an iota of doubt that like our founder leaders, despite all the differences, there still exists some goodwill that can keep us moving and chalk out the way forward.

Madam Speaker, with these few words I wish the Honourable Members of our Parliament and staff a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Madam Speaker, I support the motion before Parliament. *Vinaka*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy to take the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, the Honourable Members of Parliament - *bula vinaka* to you all.

Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand before you today in this august House and deliver my maiden speech.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank our President, His Excellency Jioji Konrote for His most gracious Address. His Excellency has rightfully set a platform for us to govern our beloved nation for the next four years.

Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate you on your re-appointment as Speaker. You have served this august Chamber once in 2014 and there is no doubt that you would continue doing that. Madam Speaker, your humbleness does not allow you to understand that you are indeed a role model of women in our country to succeed and excel and to provide leadership. I would like to thank you for that, Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, may I also congratulate and thank our Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, as under his leadership we as a nation have achieved unprecedented social and economic prosperity in the last decade, despite the other Members on the other side not willing to accept that fact. Madam Speaker, not many appreciate how much sacrifice one has to make to take a public office and that too the Office of the Prime Minister.

The rising levels of expectations from the public, our Honourable Prime Minister is just a call away from the rank and file of the ordinary Fijians. Never in the history of this country we had such an action oriented, accessible Prime Minister.

Those of us who are heading the various ministries know very well how seriously he takes his responsibility to the people of Fiji. Madam Speaker, whenever an issue, request or complaint is raised with the Honourable Prime Minister, he immediately forwards it to the responsible Minister for us to address the matter, close it off and inform him. Until such time the matter is closed, satisfactory to all parties, it is on his list, and he will check on it. He does not forget, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister has led us with dedication and commitment, and we should applaud his leadership and vision for our nation.

Madam Speaker, this country at this point in time has no substitute for him. There is no match for him. The people of this country will not settle for anyone other than him and his record of achievement speaks volumes of this.

Madam Speaker, having been through two Elections, I am quite saddened to note how the Opposition has been trying to undo all the good work that we have done to remove racialised politics in this country and take the country forward.

Madam Speaker, it saddens me to note that while we are blessed with diversity, the Opposition instead of harnessing from the richness of this diversity in ethnicity, culture and religion, they have used it as a tool to divide the nation and take us back to days where ethnic supremacy was the order of the day.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell the Opposition that while they are doing this in pursuit of the short-term goal of getting into Government, they are doing a great disservice to future Fiji because when their children and grandchildren grow up and read about Fiji's history, they would be very saddened because they will want a Fiji which embraces all and not just one ethnic group or one religion.

Madam Speaker, I sincerely hope that the Opposition understands that it is not simply a bounteous land that makes a nation, but the common threads of diverse culture, religion and identity that unites its people. A great nation can only be the consequence of the people it comprises of.

Madam Speaker, the persistence of racism and racial profiling remains a serious challenge to our hope to thrive as a nation of principles, of fairness, equality and liberty.

Madam Speaker, dangerous cocktail of wilful ignorance, racism and bigotry spewed during Election campaign remind us that hatred and animosity still fester, and there are some elements in our society who are willing to consciously impact the tenuous and fragile nature of racial harmony in the name of positive discrimination, consciously using their stature and position to poison the minds of our youths, risking incitement of more serious kind of hatred and intolerance amongst us Fijians. Often shielded by ethno-nationalistic rhetoric, they try to divide us - their views are fundamentally anti-democratic. True patriots embrace fairness, equality and liberty, and respect fellow citizens.

Madam Speaker, while social media platforms have become an increasingly ambiguous presence in people's lives across the globe, hate speech, racism, fake news and various forms of bigotry have risen through unpatriotic activities of keyboard warriors.

Madam Speaker, social media has been ungraciously misused by some to spew hate speech, racial tensions, discrimination, racial profiling, hiding behind fake identities; most often on foreign land these perpetrators sell intolerance and bigotry, covered with fabric of patriotism. Madam Speaker, hate speech is dangerous because words have power and can influence others to act. Hate tears society along racial, ethnic, gender and religious lines.

Madam Speaker, it is time now that we pledge that we will not let self-political gains and nationalistic ideologies divide us. We, all the elected members of this august House should ensure that our supporters do not demean others on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age and disability.

Madam Speaker, we have come a long way to let ungodly thoughts undermine our dream for our nation's future, that is peace, prosperity, stability and equality. We must heal the divisions caused by intolerance and bigotry. It is a challenge for Honourable Members on the other side, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, to mend all these, we need to do something. First and foremost, we need to act. In the face of hatred and racial discrimination, apathy will be interpreted as acceptance by the perpetrators. We must take action; if we do not, hate and discrimination will persist.

Madam Speaker, I urge all fellow Fijians to reject the leaders who show bias and fail to act on such issues. Look inside yourself for biases and stereotypes. We all grow up with prejudices and fear.

Madam Speaker, I still believe the best days are ahead, and that our commonalities will prevail over our differences. Madam Speaker, I would like to quote Ban Ki-moon, the 8th Secretary General of the United Nations, and I quote:

“Defeating racism, tribalism, intolerance and all forms of discrimination will liberate us all, victim and perpetrator alike.”

Let us practice motivation and love, not discrimination and hate.

Madam Speaker, I wish to ask the leaders on the other side not to remain silent when their neighbours, friends or fellow colleagues is making racial or hate comments. Stop them and have a word with them! If you are quiet, thinking that it does not affect you, then think twice as someday it might affect you.

In 1987 when Honourable Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka carried out the *coup*, majority of the *iTaukei* were applauding and cheering in support of the *coup*. In 2006, when the Honourable Prime

Minister took over the reins of the Government to put an end to discrimination and bring prosperity to our nation, the same people turned around and said, "Oh! it is bad." But in 1987, there was cheering, they were enjoying, and now they turned around and said, "Oh, this is bad. Governments should not be taken over."

Madam Speaker, let me further reinforce this by quoting the famous poem by a German pastor, Martin Niemoller, and I quote:

"First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me."

Madam Speaker, not all is lost. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Fijians who chose truth over lies, prosperity over failure, impartiality over discrimination, stability over chaos and equality over inequality. Madam Speaker, let me assure those we chose otherwise, we are here to serve all, to provide service without discrimination.

Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate that we, on this side of this august House are guided by principles of fairness, equality and our commitment to the well-being of all Fijians. I stand humbled in this august House ready to serve my fellow Fijians, together we can move Fiji forward. I take on this task with humility, but also with determination, with the awareness of my limits but also with passion.

Madam Speaker, agriculture has always been an integral part of most Fijians, including me. I grew up on a farm, realising the benefits derived from hard work, perseverance and being resilient - resilient through drought, floods and markets.

Madam Speaker, I still recall those days when we used to return home from school at 4.30 p.m., change, have a bowl of tea and go to the farm, and work till the sun sets. We were mindful that our work on the farm will bring food on the table. How we had to grow cash crops, sell in Nadi market on Saturdays so that we could pay our school fees, pay for textbooks and bus fare. Those children who were children of unskilled labourers, not having land, succumbed to their destiny and thus, poverty and hardship continued over generation across generation.

Madam Speaker, growing up toiling the soil gives a strong attachment to the country and it is integral to what I am today. Those who may be dismissive of this statement as prosaic could possibly not have had the seminal experience of life on farms.

Madam Speaker, I thank my predecessor, the Honourable Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu for a job well done during his tenure at the Ministry and I assure this House that I would carry on from thereon. Madam Speaker, I have always regarded agriculture as a noble profession, it feeds people and provides basic necessities. Agriculture is not the beneficiary of the exploitation of people's weakness, it is crucial for people's sustenance.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand here as Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment. I sincerely appreciate the confidence bestowed on me to lead these ministries. Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment are intrinsically linked and it is essential we realise the synergies between these sectors.

Madam Speaker, given uncertainties in future climate, it is essential that we move towards developing modern solutions for farming that incorporates climate change. We need to modernise our agriculture sector, new technology, mechanisation and better production to meet the growing demand

for quality food and to improve the nation's foreign trade balance and ensure food security for the whole population. Madam Speaker, in doing so we need to start identifying partners with whom we can work to deliver.

Madam Speaker, a key thematic area that the Ministry will focus on is improving the delivery of Agriculture Extension Services to our farmers. Moreover, the Ministry under the 2018-2019 Budget will focus on the review of its current organisational structure as one of its key activities.

Madam Speaker, issues pertaining to agriculture cannot be addressed in isolation, there is a need to collaborate to further develop the agriculture sector in Fiji. We need further research and development on agronomy, horticulture, soil science, livestock production, veterinary science, plant pathology and value addition, all essentially aimed at climate-proofing our agriculture sector.

Madam Speaker, we have, in fact, on Monday started discussions with the Fiji National University (FNU). With its academic expertise, FNU is the best-placed institution to provide technical support and much needed ideas, and also partner to undertake research with our staff. There are a volume of experts, Madam Speaker, like professors and researchers at FNU, whom we are now wanting to further strengthen the relationship that was built by our predecessors.

Madam Speaker, improving agriculture means that we directly support our farmers, our households and communities. We will continue to support our agro-processors and exporters, as they value add to our products and expand export opportunities.

Madam Speaker, one of our top priorities will be to continue facilitating the availability of more land for productive use. As we all know, that land is an important prerequisite for socio-economic development. Intimately linked to this is the sustainable utilisation of land which balances production with protection that safeguards the rights of landowners for future generations. This requires a sound land-use framework which will promote the proper and sustainable use of land, and one that supports agriculture production in the immediate and in the long term.

Madam Speaker, land in economics is classified as natural capital. Unless it is put to positive use and generates positive returns, it is termed as dead capital.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to provide the required leverage to farmers via the farm support programmes so that not only existing farmers are given space to grow, but we also attract new, young and farmers with the cooperate image.

Madam Speaker, we will ensure that we achieve the policies and strategies outlined in our national documents like the 5-year and 20-year Development Plan.

Madam Speaker, it is essential that our farmers get a better return back to the farm gate. This is crucial and ensures sustainability of the farms. Getting a better return at farm gate means securing the future for Fijian farms in the global marketplace.

Madam Speaker, for me, the Fijian farming and the return that they get drives me and it gives me the purpose of my job. During my last meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture staff yesterday, Madam Speaker, I emphasised to them about the need to put farmers first, and that will now be our motto.

Madam Speaker, more details of future activities will be flashed out later on during Ministerial Statements.

The rural and maritime areas in Fiji constitute about 94 percent of its complete landmass. Madam Speaker, 44.1 percent of the total Fijian population reside in the rural areas and more often depend on agriculture to support their livelihood.

The Government has prioritised rural development with improvements in the infrastructure and provision of adequate public utilities. Madam Speaker, we are now working very closely with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, and I promise that a lot of work to be done in this area.

In the interior and maritime development, we have just came out from a meeting at 1.00 p.m, with all the District Officers and Commissioner Eastern at the Ministry's Office, giving out the agenda for now and what we are going to do and how we are going to gallop with the work that we need to do.

Madam Speaker, Waterways and Environment have cultural and spiritual value for many people in Fiji. Important customs and spiritual beliefs of the Fijian community are embedded in our waterways and environment.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, Waterways and Environment are linked to important sources of food, recreation and income and as such, are integral to our way of life. As such, it is timely that we consolidate efforts to safeguard our environment and waterways.

Madam Speaker, given such importance of this Ministry, instead of applauding and thanking the Government for establishing a dedicated Ministry for Waterways and Environment, some people made fun of it saying it is a Ministry of Waste, Ministry of Sewerage, et cetera. Madam Speaker, that is how short-sighted some people are. They have no vision, Madam Speaker. I have always said, "We are about the future. We look at the future."

The formulation of the Ministry of Waterways and Environment reflects Government's vision to manage our water resources, protect our communities and households and villages and safeguard our environment to integrate a pragmatic approach, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will soon start developing the National Waterways Policy to address bigger issues and challenges faced at our catchments.

Madam Speaker, in concluding this speech, I wish to thank my fellow Fijians for the trust they have placed in me. Many people have worked tirelessly to get me here, I appreciate the effort and support.

Madam Speaker, I was startled and humbled by the support I received along the way. I appreciate and thank them all and I promise to honour their effort. To my family, thank you for being there for me. Without your love and support, I would not have taken this journey.

Madam Speaker, while I have thanked the Honourable Prime Minister for his leadership in the Party, it will be remiss of me if I do not acknowledge the great work done by our party General Secretary, Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum in getting the FijiFirst team this far. It is a team, Madam Speaker. He has sacrificed his personal, family time and health for nation building. While some on the other side, blinded by religious curtains do not acknowledge his contribution now, maybe after 20 or 30 years down the line, they will cherish his contribution towards building a safer, peaceful, better and modern Fiji.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- That is the time their children and grandchildren will say “Papa, it is amazing, we are like Australia, New Zealand and America.”

Madam Speaker, I also want to acknowledge the great work done by our Youth Leader, Ms. Naziah Ali. She held the fort during one of the most crucial time for all of us. At one point in time, we were all waiting for the beep sound of the *Viber* message from her giving us the latest updates. Thank you Naziah, you are a great person, a great team player, we miss you a lot in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, our office staff, Ben, Whitney, Damian and the fleet of volunteers who worked tirelessly behind the scene in ensuring that we get to the people with full information, thank you.

Madam Speaker, I commit myself to represent all Fijians to contribute to the well-being and growth of this nation. Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, 27th November, 2018 the Honourable Tuisawau approached me to discuss about some assistance to farmers in his area. I saw some degree of hesitation in him discussing that with me. I tapped him on the shoulder and said, “This Government is for all. Do not hesitate to talk to me.” I urge Members of this august House to come forward and discuss with us their issues, and together we can improve, but do not goose step and come to the Parliament, in front of the camera with big statements.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER:- Thank you, Honourable Member.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- At this juncture, Honourable Members I would like to welcome the medical team who have come in this afternoon.

I guess you will understand why our blood pressure rises and then quickly comes down again. Thank you for your interest in Parliament.

I now invite the Honourable Jese Saukuru to take the floor.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- *Cola vina*, Madam Speaker. First and foremost, I thank my Lord Jesus Christ for this wonderful opportunity to stand here as a Member of this august House. Let me quote from *Isaiah 59:1*: “Listen! The Lord’s arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call.”

I rise to give my maiden speech and to respond to the motion before the House. However, Madam Speaker, allow me to share my congratulatory message first. I wish to first congratulate the 458,335 voters who turned out to cast their votes during our General Elections from the 5th to 14th November, 2018.

Madam Speaker, congratulation on your re-election as the Speaker of this august House and the Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar. I congratulate all my colleagues who have won their seats to be Members of this House in the next four years. I also wish to congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers and other Members of Parliament on the other side of the House.

I wish to congratulate the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and all of us on this side of the House. I also wish to acknowledge and congratulate our 10 women Members with a 20 percent increase in female representation in this Parliament.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the individuals, groups and organisations who had supported me during my campaign. Without their support, I would not have been a Member of this august House.

- My loving wife Viniana Saukuru, my daughter Makereta Botitu, my son Jese Saukuru (Junior) and my grandson, Akuila Botitu Tiqe;
- *Na Momo na Tui Vitogo* and the *vanua o Vitogo* for their trust in me and the SODELPA Party to be the vehicle for change on this great land;
- *Na Momo na Taukei Vidilo* and the *vanua o Vidilo* for their nomination and support;
- *Delaniyavu e Tabuatolu, Na Momo na Tui Naloto* and the *vanua o Naloto*;
- *Delaniyavu e Namaravulevu, Na Momo na Tui Yakete* and the *vanua o Yakete*;
- *Vanua o Nakoronubu, Suelevu e Nawaiviluri, na Momo na Tui Ba*;
- *Delaniyavu e Naroyasi, Na Momo na Tui Magodro* and the *vanua o Magodro*;
- *Delaniyavu e Vatanitawake, Na Momo na Tui Yasawa* and the *vanua o Yasawa*;
- *Delaniyavu e Korotuilagi, Na Momo na Tui Drola* and the *vanua o Drola*;
- *Delaniyavu e Nawavuso, Na Momo na Tui Yaqweta* and the *vanua o Yaqweta*;
- *Delaniyavu e Nadikilagi, Na Momo na Tui Marou* and the *vanua o Marou*;
- *Delaniyavu e Neilesu, Na Momo na Tui Naviti* and the *vanua o Naviti*;
- *Delaniyavu e Nalotu, Na Momo na Saubuli na Tui Waya* and the *vanua o Waya*;
- *Delaniyavu e Gaunavou, Na Momo na Tui Viwa* and the *vanua o Viwa*;
- *Delaniyavu e Boutolu, vanua o Waya Sewa*;
- *Vanua Burenitu, Na Momo na Taukei Burenitu* of Lekutu in Bua; and
- *Tokatoka Vunatawa* of Vitogo, *Na Momo Taukei Vunatawa*.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank all the individuals and church groups that offered spiritual and moral support in my campaign trail:-

- *Vakatawa Isoa Sauvakacolo* and his family;
- *Vakatawa Kata Naloma* of Waya Sewa and his family;
- Nau Meri and her Peceliema Women's Prayer Group;
- *Talatala Tomu Wainiqolo* of *Tabacakacaka Vitogo* and his Prayer Group;
- *Talatala Bose* of *Tabacakacaka Saru* and his Prayer Group;
- All the believers that had been praying for the General Elections, I thank you all sincerely.

I further wish to thank all my 555 team who supported me with my campaign and during the elections:

- Mr. Kitone Vuataki, Mr. Albert Wise, Mr. Inia Qereqeretabua, Poasa, Aunty Gina, Vava Vili, Taitusi and Daki;
- Jone Tiqe, Ben Sokia and families;
- Tai Sala and all her polling agents;
- Maikeli Sauqaqa and his agents;
- Kemueli, Master Naivalu and their polling agents;
- Ratu Asaeli, Pita Turua and their agents in Yasawa;
- *Tuirara levu e Magodro*;
- Rukua and the Naudolu family;
- Ovini Baleinamau and *vanua o Burenitu*; and
- Ba Provincial Holdings Company Limited (BPHCL) staff, RKS Old Boys (Lautoka) and all the volunteers who had assisted during the polling day.

Madam Speaker, I support His Excellency's reminder that the 2018 General Elections is over and we are already going through the next phase of the election process in the formation of Government and we had been sworn in as Members of this honourable House. Being a new Member of the House, I have been following very closely all the speeches starting from Monday, 26th November, 2018. It is sad to note that some speakers are still in their campaign mode by trying to promote party politics.

I beg each and every Honourable Member of this House to rise above that. We are the representatives of the people who deserve much better than our individual interests. Let us work together for the benefit of our people and for Fiji.

I support Honourable Gavoka's plea yesterday in this House that we need to change our attitude and a bipartisan approach would be the best platform for the future.

Madam Speaker, my province is the most populous with more than a quarter of the nation's total at the 2017 Census. The Ba Province covers a land area of about 2,634 square kilometres. It is blessed with an abundance of natural resources that our economy relies upon and it is the second largest province. Madam Speaker, I will be the lone voice of the Ba Province from this side of the House. However, I know that I am not alone as I have other "koi Ba" on the other side of the House and that we will do our best to represent our people with dignity and commitment.

Interestingly, the Honourable Prime Minister collected quite a significant number of votes from my province and we expect a reciprocating gesture from his high office too in giving back to the people what they deserve. Madam Speaker, I wish to comment on His Excellency the President's most gracious Address on democracy: "Democracy is not a static thing, it must grow with the people and incorporate new found wisdom".

Madam Speaker, in 1874 Fiji became a British Colony, an Independent Sovereign Democratic State in 1970 and in 1988 a Sovereign Democratic Republic where it relinquished all ties from Her Majesty. The Treaty of Cession signed by Ratu Seru Cakobau as Tui Viti and the 12 other chiefs with the British Crown recited that they were: "Desirous of securing the promotion of civilisation and Christianity and of increasing trade and industry within the said islands."

Madam Speaker, in 1776 Alexander Fraser Tytler, a European historian published "*The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic*." In this publication, Tytler reported that from his research he had determined the following:

"A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising them the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that the democracy always collapses over a loss of fiscal responsibility, always followed by a dictatorship. The average of the world's great civilisations before they declined has been 200 years. These nations have progressed in this sequence from:

- bondage to spiritual faith;
- spiritual faith to great courage;
- courage to liberty;
- liberty to abundance;
- abundance to selfishness;
- selfishness to complacency;
- complacency to apathy;
- apathy to dependency; and

- dependency back to bondage.”

Madam Speaker, Fiji was liberated in 1988 and is supposed to still be enjoying life in its abundance state after exactly 30 years of its liberation. The move for our spiritual liberation, first started in 1835 at Tubou in Lakeba and I am afraid to note that we are only left with another 17 years to complete the average length of this democratic form of government before we are shackled again in bondage and the cycle continues.

The Government's debt is at its highest, more students are in debt in the pretext of education scholarships...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nonsense.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- ...LOUs have lost control over their resources and there is a clear decline in moral values in our societies.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- The fact of the matter is that Ba Province covers a land area of 2,634 square kilometres and a very resourceful province that supports our economy. From the highlands of Savatu, Magodro and Rukuruku Districts to the Yasawa Group of Islands, their voices also need to be heard in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, our cause for fair representation is clear and we wish to articulate this in this response.

Madam Speaker, affirmative action is an outcome of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, intended to provide equal opportunities for members of minority groups and women and women in education and employment. In 1961, President Kennedy was the first to use the term, 'affirmative action', in an Executive Order that directed government contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, colour or national origin. For Fiji, affirmative action policies were initially focused on improving opportunities for ordinary Fijians in employment, education and in business.

Madam Speaker, it is sad to note that some political leaders in Fiji are interpreting our own affirmative action program as being racist. Our nation only gained its Independence in 1970 and we need affirmative action programs to bridge the gap when other nations have aged with their own civilisation. Madam Speaker, I am opposed to the idea that *iTaukei* are 'Asset Rich and Cash Poor'.

The rich have lots of money but they might also have lots of expenses that keep them up at night but the wealthy do not worry about money. The latter defines our indigenous population pretty well, while other people are compelled to grow their assets and make more cash. Landowners are more committed to the protection of their inheritance that had been passed on from generation to generation.

Madam Speaker, I am of the view that the greatest challenge is that landowners have entered an era of declining trust though to varying degrees in Government and institutions like the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (*iTLTB*) which was set up in 1940 as the Native Land Trust Board, under the *iTaukei* Land Trust Act. Its initial purpose was to secure, protect and manage landownership rights assigned to the *iTaukei* landowners and to facilitate commercial transactions that revolved around its use.

However, there are several drives that contribute to our landowners decline in trust towards *iTLTB*. These include:

- Perceptions of bias service;
- Limited understanding of the process and expectations of engagement;
- Political alignment and interference;
- Unfriendly policies; and
- Reactive service response.

In his opening Address to the FAO/USP/RICS Foundation South Pacific Land Tenure Conflict Symposium in Suva in April 2002, the late Mr. Savenaca Siwatibau commented, and I quote:

“They say that land like financial and human capital is a factor of production which helps drive economic and social development, generate national income, wealth, jobs and government revenue, combat poverty, improve the standard of living of all and ultimately entrenched social and political stability in any country. Land tenure, like culture and tradition, stands to evolve organically overtime within a society. As in all things, changes and solutions have to be made and formulated. Solutions must be formulated from within and must reflect national, family and individual needs and aspirations and the change in global, regional, national, economic, social and political dynamics that determine.”

There are quite a lot of money sitting with iTLTB today that can be wisely invested for the development of the *i Taukei*. We are talking about landowners' money that could easily fund projects and other investments to ensure that the beneficiaries become cash rich as well. The SVT Government had initially developed this concept with the setting up of Provincial Companies and the Fijian Holdings Limited.

Madam Speaker, the concept will encourage more participation from the shareholders. However, the concept is not well-supported by iTLTB to complement the developments on the ground, for example, some other investment companies are winning from the \$7.9 million worth of Ba's *Vola Ni Kawa Bula* (VKB) registered under 18 lease monies annually. With this type of cash flow, Madam Speaker, landowners are cash- sufficient to fund their own administration and other investments and not to rely on Government funding all the time.

On the same token, Madam Speaker, it is my plea to Government to consider the following:

1. While I thank the Minister for Forest and my Koicalevu for his clarification yesterday, I am asking Government to kindly consider increasing the shares of the pine landowners that is held in trust by the Fiji Pine Trust and Fiji Pine Ltd. I am sure they could easily do this through their dividend rights to buy redeemable shares of Fiji Pine Ltd;
2. Review and restore traditional leaders' share of lease money to ensure that they are able to perform their customary roles. For eight years, our chiefs and leaders of the *vanua* have been deprived of their share of their lease money;
3. I am also asking Government to direct *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (TLTB) accordingly to seek the landowners' consent before the leasing of the *iTaukei* land. The newspaper article showed by the Honourable Radrodro is a reality of what is happening on the ground. I come from Vitogo, Madam Speaker, 700 acres of land belonging to the Tui Vitogo had been leased out without their consent;
4. Madam Speaker, infrastructure development is key for faster economic growth and the alleviation of poverty in our country. A clear message that came out very strongly and a concern during the General Elections is urban drift. I was saddened to see that about 50

percent of villagers on the islands and highlands are now living in urban centres around Viti Levu.

I am asking the Government to consider the following:

1. Offer tax incentives for local backpacker operators that would create more employment opportunities for our rural dwellers;
2. Incentive packages for those who wish to explore new businesses by developing their resources;
3. Creating trading centres on the islands and highlands of Ba that will bring the services closer to the people;
4. Improve on the shipping service to the Yasawa Group of islands;
5. The six villages of Tikina Nalotawa need to be linked through good road as they do share the same primary school;
6. I ask the Honourable Koroilavesau to facilitate the construction of an ice plant for the people of Yasawa i yata.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured and privileged to be appointed as Opposition spokesman on the Rural Development and Disaster Management, and I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment for updating this House on the policies and programmes of the Government of the day in relation to rural development and disaster management.

Madam Speaker, in respect of rural development, I have the following statements to make:

1. There is a need for continued development and maintenance of communications and transportation infrastructure to link them and empower the people of this nation;
2. The development of infrastructure to open up the vast tracts of land for development and allow the fruits of development to trickle down to the masses.
3. The sanitisation of the policies and programmes of other Government departments, grants by foreign Governments.

I wish Members of the House a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon our final speaker for today, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and Attorney-General, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Honourable Rasova has kind of thrown my speech somewhat in the air because of a very short speech. In fact, I am not used to writing written speeches or giving written speeches but I dictated something has not been typed up. But, Madam Speaker, I rise to give my maiden speech after 2014 and since the last time we spoke, Madam Speaker, my wife, Ela, and I, have become parents again.

(Applause)

We now have three children: Ibrahim, Idris and Imaan, Imaan being the new addition, born on 7th July, last year. Suffice to say, Madam Speaker, some of us believe that a daughter is indeed a blessing and a sign of good things to come.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank my children although that probably Imaan will not understand me for the deep comfort and distraction they provided for me from public life.

I wish to thank my parents Mrs. Lateefa and Mr. Sayed-Khaiyum. Madam Speaker, unfortunately they have also been the victims of social media and the unwarranted despicable type of politicking that took place in the Elections. They were, of course, subject to the social media abuse. Even my mother was not spared, questioning my parentage.

Madam Speaker, these people (my parents) are honourable, humble, decent and loving people. I have only one sibling and I wish to thank him and his wife and their children for being there, of course, and the rest of the extended family my aunty, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, of course, the FijiFirst family, the young volunteers, there are numerous, hundreds of thousands of them, it would be amiss of me to mention all their names at the expense of missing out some of them. There is one person I would like to particularly mention, Madam Speaker, and that is Mr. Damian Whippy. Mr. Damian deserves a particular mention and I am sure most of the Honourable Members of this side of the House will agree with that.

Madam Speaker, Mrs. Ela, my wife, is a very special person. As I have mentioned in 2014, she is an extremely humble human being, who avoids public settings like a plague, but she is a person of tenacity and, indeed, resolve. She would not admit it but I know she is. For the past four years in particular, and the lead up to this Elections, personal and ethnic religious vilifications, in particular against me, increased significantly. She, of course, was a volunteer with FijiFirst and had to endure the *Facebook* vitriol as she was also part of the team that was monitoring social media.

I know she was personally and extremely upset by it and I perhaps did not want to acknowledge it at that point in time because I was just simply focused on the Elections. I know also that she questioned the hypocrisy of those who professed to be religious, church goers yet were extremely racist and did not see the correct paradox in that. Those who wanted to put people on *bilibilis* and send them back to wherever they came from. More excruciating, Madam Speaker, and what she questioned were those from the other side who never openly asked people to stop engaging from such vitriol and vilification, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I admire her fortitude, her belief in the principles of inclusiveness and equal citizenry and not feeling that her faith or her identity was ever threatened unlike some of the Members on the other side. Of course, Madam Speaker, my respect and admiration for her increases ever more knowing that her father is in the Party that was working against FijiFirst.

Madam Speaker, despite this, she continued to be a very good and loving daughter for her father and mother. Madam Speaker, she was and is a wonderful wife, partner, friend and companion. Madam Speaker, listening to most of the Members on the other side, I feel like a *deja vu*. A *déjà vu* Madam Speaker, that goes back into time and this time is 2014, and again the same type of vitriol, allegations against the Constitution, et cetera.

However, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate all the Honourable Members elected to Parliament through their respective parties. In particular, Madam Speaker, I would like to welcome all

the new Members, more so particularly the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I do not know how he feels but coming to the Chamber, where he carried out the *coup* on 14th May, 1987, it may, in fact, be a cathartic moment for him.

This is the very Chamber where the rule of law in Fiji was violated in a dramatic manner. I had said this, Madam Speaker, before that when we were actually renovating this Chamber and we decided to move Parliament from Veiuto to here. When we were painting this Chamber, I had asked the people who were painting this Chamber to make sure that the bullet that went through the ceiling or the wall there was actually preserved and put in a glass case, so we could be reminded of our past, because any country that cannot deal with its past in a deliberative manner will not have a good future.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, the workers who were cleaning or renovating this in their earnestness actually covered the indentation. Perhaps, Madam Speaker, this is the psyche that we all have; our enthusiasm to present a clean and sanitised version of this Chamber covered over by the indentation.

Madam Speaker, this is perhaps what some of the Members of the Opposition indeed have done. They want to present a sanitised version of history, a particular version of history. They want to ignore many facts and indeed, Madam Speaker, they do not want to know the truth. This type of politics are working to their advantage and I want to congratulate them because they would be known as the great manipulators. Manipulation of facts, the manipulation of trying to raise a communal sense of antagonism of creating a dichotomous approach to our country is what they have successfully done so.

After all, Madam Speaker, their leader's symbolises the great chasm that is created by his actions on 14th May, 1987 and 25th September, 1987, the reality of course, Madam Speaker, is that they did not win the Elections. The reality is that the overwhelming majority of Fijians despite the vitriol vilification, obfuscation of facts chose FijiFirst. It chose Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama to be the Prime Minister. Discs were floating around, claiming the end of indigenous rights as they did in 2014, claiming that Fiji was or parts of Fiji was sold to China, claims about a Muslim takeover. In fact in one of the sessions we had in the Western Division, I heard a really beautiful one where that the public private partnership of the hospitals, we would give it to the Chinese and that all of us who went to the hospital subsequently would get an injection on our bums and we would all die and the Chinese would take over. This is the level of substitute of lies for facts that took place, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, these are the shenanigans that took place.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has said the Elections are over, we have said that. Our Honourable Prime Minister of course has never swayed from the principled position he took since 5th December, 2006. He has never scummed to political expediency as some of the others on the other side have. He has never scummed to gaining popularity by simply appealing to communalistic politics. His vision, his idea of building a strong nation state based on the principles and values and common equal citizenry without compromising the special protection of *i Taukei* land, Honourable Saukuru. The recognition and preservation of the unique culture and traditions, customs and languages which of course include people from Rotuma, he has never swayed away from.

I know the Honourable Gavoka and the others have led a litany of barrage against Honourable Alvick Maharaj. The reality is that the obsession by the Opposition to say FijiFirst won by 147,000 votes is not correct. May I remind those on the opposite side, FijiFirst has a majority of 50.02 percent of the votes, SODELPA has 39.85 percent, NFP with only 7.38 percent, that is a big difference. The five opposition political parties with 200 candidates which they claim has part of the opposition votes. Their combined resources and combined lies could not defeat FijiFirst, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, 200 candidates against 51 of us. They are all on one side, Madam Speaker, of course, NFP was doing all sorts of shenanigans and deals and what have you. FijiFirst, Madam Speaker, has 13,000 more votes than SODELPA and NFP combined.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- SODELPA should remember, Madam Speaker, that 273,000 Fijian voters rejected them, approximately 420,000 voters rejected NFP and told them that they are not fit for Parliament.

Madam Speaker, if the voter turnout was higher similar to 2014, especially in the Western and Central Divisions, we saw low voter turnout this year, FijiFirst would have get more than 30 seats, Madam Speaker. So SODELPA, Madam Speaker, should not celebrate they perhaps have the rain to thank.

Madam Speaker, I just want to remind them about the 2001 and 2006 Elections. The SDL votes in 2001 and 2006, this is how it goes. The SDL in 2001 received only 26 percent of the total votes but with the majority of 32 seats in Parliament, whereas the Fiji Labour Party with 34.8 percent of the votes, got only 28 seats. NFP, of course, did a lot better than what they are doing now, there were 11.7 percent of the votes but they did not win a single seat, Madam Speaker.

In 2006, Madam Speaker, SDL with 44.6 percent of the votes got a 36-seat majority and they won by 1 seat. If you look at all the Opposition seats, and guess what Madam Speaker, the seat that they won, they won by only 17 votes. Honourable Lalabalavu knows this; Laucala Open Constituency, just by 17 votes, no one talked about tyranny of the majority then. No one talked about the tyranny of the majority then, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, they also did not tell us if the voter turnout 2006 was actually 64 percent. They are now claiming that this 70 percent is too low notwithstanding the rain. They are not admitting that voter turnout was 84 percent in 2014, they are not telling us that the invalid votes in 2014 was a mere 0.7 percent and a mere 0.9 percent in 2006, 2001 invalid votes were 9 percent and 10 percent respectively.

Madam Speaker, I am highlighting this because the Honourable Members on the other side, and in fact I went and thanked the Honourable Leader of Opposition for his speech. I only had one gripe with him and I told him which I will come to later on, but the fact that he is saying that we need to work together; we all believe in that. Some of them have said that, but some of them continue to spew immaterial facts. Some of them continue to spew lies, some of them continue to not recognise the facts and I want to highlight the facts to them, because if you want to come to clean hands to this Chamber, you must recognise the facts, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, again all sorts of shenanigans, Honourable Radrodro said that there is no interim government before elections, that is the convention. I looked across to the Honourable Leader of Opposition and I said; "There is no Interim Government before Elections" and he agreed with me. He knows that, what convention is he talking about? There is no such convention in Fiji since Independence.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that, if the Honourable Members want to make a legal challenge to the results, they are free to do so. Please go and do so but this is not the court. Take your arguments to the court and not over here.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, what has happened in this Chamber, that is how democracy works. The reality is that, we need to be focused on the economy and I agree with every single Member in this Chamber that wants to focus on the economy.

Madam Speaker, we have a very young population; 50 percent of our population is below the age of 27. When we have a young population, as I have said before, we will produce more babies a lot more quicker. The reality is, a younger population procreates a lot faster. We have to put in place sustainable policies so this nonsense about free university, this nonsense about TELS being a burden.

Madam Speaker, the reality is this, you cannot afford to pay for everyone's university fees. Today we have 19,000 students in universities. We have to ensure that as soon as they get out of university, becomes mums and fathers, they need to have their children to also have access to free education in primary schools, secondary schools, access to scholarships and also to TELS loans.

Madam Speaker, as has been highlighted on a number of occasions, there are only five or six countries in the world that have universities completely free. The taxation rates in those countries are 50 percent or even more. Our taxation rate does not even start until you earn more than \$30,000.

Madam Speaker, I also have to talk about how the Honourable Members in this Chamber, all of them, and I appreciate the fact that they have done that, have sworn to uphold the Constitution but it is quite amazing, that some of them, even within a few hours of swearing to uphold the Constitution have debunked the Constitution.

Honourable Tabuya, normally do not retort to things like that, says "no choice". She had a choice, she could have not participated in the Election under the Constitution. Madam Speaker, that was her choice.

Madam Speaker, there are, of course, people with principles and there are people with no principles. The reality is that, they talked about this Constitution being shoved down their throats and this we had been told since 2014. If the 1990 Constitution was so wonderful, which we know did not have any consultations, why was it promulgated at midnight, in the middle of the dark of the night?

Madam Speaker, the 2013 Constitution was celebrated in His Excellency's at the State House, with people – diplomats and the various NGOs, they all attended this. So the 19 public consultations that were held in respect of the Constitution. Again, like I said, Madam Speaker, it would appear I am going through a *déjà vu* by having to stand here.

Madam Speaker, the whole argument about the tyranny of the majority falls flat in his face and anyone that knows an iota about the tyranny of the majority and the whole philosophy and the pasimology behind it, it stems from the Americans. It gained credence because the elites in America believed that somehow or the other, they need to be protected from the tyranny of the vast masses just in case they did something that will go against the elite establishment. That is where the term came from, Madam Speaker.

We now have in the 21st Century, Madam Speaker, numerous independent institutions that actually protect us from the tyranny of the so-called majority, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is what I want to be able to address because the entire premise for most of the speakers on the other side is based on the politics of ethnicity.

Madam Speaker, I want to quote someone who I have huge respect for, Mr. Simone Durutalo. Madam Speaker, Simone Durutalo in his book which I have over here and you can get it from USP, Honourable Bulitavu, you should read it. He says -

“In the case of Fiji, we can see that despite the emergence of classes, those of the upper reach of the society are using the ethnic identities both to secure their class benefits and to secure the basis for them from their fellow ethnics. It is often not appreciated the ethnic institutions, association, parties may be created or instigated by the new men of power, pursuing their own special interests which are time and again the constitutive interest of emerging classes ethnicity in this context becomes a mask for class privilege.”

Madam Speaker, linked to this, it goes on to say:

“... is the need for most ruling classes to create a devil. One particular group will be singled out and selected is the devil, depends on the nature of a country's historical development and the visibility of the group designated as the scapegoat.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca in fact very much participated in this way of thinking. And I have here with me, Madam Speaker, unfortunately I cannot find the script but which you can again get at USP, it is written by Larry Thomas.

Honourable Bulanauca, was giving a speech while Mahendra Chaudhry's Government was being taken over and I have it translated. They have the subtitles (you can watch the video), it says:

“Ladies and gentlemen I want to briefly explain three things. The government is divided into three major parts. The first is the Legislature, the Parliament the law is built from it ...”

“Who is the head? The first, Legislature. Chaudhry is a Hindu, satan. The second, the Executive. Who is the head? Chaudhry, he is a Hindu, satan. The third, Security. Who is in charge? The NFP is no longer but they brought back another Hindu, Jai Ram Reddy. The 1997 Constitution is Jay Ram Reddy's.”

Madam Speaker, these are a few things I want to tell you. Let us not be idle but be alert. Let us remain

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What happened, Madam Speaker? I will just go quickly to finish this.

Madam Speaker, this continued in 2014, very simple things were taken out of context.

In the last Parliament, Madam Speaker, when Honourable Tikoca was here (he is no longer Honourable), when Honourable Tikoca was honourable, when he was here in this Parliament, everyone knew he had a baritone voice. We always had a go at each other where Honourable Lynda Tabuya sits, and I always use to remark to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Leader of Government saying, “His like Darth Vader's voice.”

I stood up that day and I mimicked him. Maybe a bad impression of Darth Vader but everyone laughed, Madam Speaker, including you, including him - everyone laughed. The video will show you that everyone laughed, Madam Speaker, but guess what? Two days, three days later, he came back and

said that I was mimicking him as a monkey. This is how ridiculous ethnic politics take us. Honourable Qereqeretabua is also not immune from this, Madam Speaker, unfortunately you missed out.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank you for your guidance and your appointment as Speaker and also want to wish the Electoral Commission and the Supervisor of Election for an excellent job and a wonderful job they have done. Thank you.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That brings us to the end of our sitting for today and I thank you all for your contributions to today's debate.

As advised earlier, the Business Committee Members are reminded of our meeting in the Small Committee Room straight after this.

Thank you Honourable Members. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m..

The Parliament adjourned at 4.15 p.m.