

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER, 2019**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**TUESDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER, 2019**

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 Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu, the Honourable M.R. Leawere, the Honourable A.M. Radrodro and the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 18th November, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome

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

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the public gallery and those who are watching the live broadcast or proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking an interest in the proceedings of your Parliament.

For the information of all Honourable Members, later this morning during the tea break, we will launch our Committee broadcast system which will enable the live broadcast of our Parliamentary Standing Committee meetings. We have achieved another milestone and I would like all of us to be at the launch and to show our appreciation and gratitude to the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project (FPSP), which is funded by the governments of New Zealand, Australia and Japan. Thank you, Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament, the Honourable Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu, to move his motion.

**RESTORATION OF BILLS**

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 97, I hereby move:

That the following Bills be restored to the Order Paper, the:

1. Adoption Bill 2018, Bill No. 32 of 2018;

2. Code of Conduct Bill 2018, Bill No. 33 of 2018; and
3. Registration of Sex Offenders Bill, Bill No. 34 of 2018.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak to his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 97(1) provides that a Bill that lapses due to prorogation before it has been passed may proceed in the next session at the stage it had reached in the previous Session by resolution of Parliament, restoring the Bill to the Order Paper.

As all Honourable Members may be aware, Parliament is mandated under Section 46 of the Fijian Constitution to make laws for the State through the enactment of Bills passed by Parliament and assented to by His Excellency, the President.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the present moment, the Standing Orders Committee is unable to proceed with any work on these Bills, as those had all lapsed during the Prorogation on 21st October, 2019.

Since the last Prorogation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bills which had lapsed are the:

1. Adoption Bill 2018;
2. Code of Conduct Bill 2018; and
3. Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is imperative for Parliament and its Standing Committees to fulfil its constitutional mandate and representative function. Therefore, I seek support from all Honourable Members to approve the motion before this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the opening of the last session of the Parliament and up until Prorogation on 21st October, 2019, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights had undertaken extensive consultations, deliberations and meetings on these three Bills.

The Standing Committee will need, at some point, to conclude its work on these Bills and table them back in Parliament. But in order to do that, Parliament needs to restore these Bills to the Order Paper. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is purely a procedural motion whereby the lapsed Bills must be reinstated and restored to the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament needs to approve this motion so that it is fully compliant with the Standing Orders. And I do commend this motion to Parliament and I hereby seek support from all Honourable Members to approve the motion before this august House. I thank you for this opportunity to move this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Government in Parliament. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

Honourable Members, since no one wishes to take the floor, I call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have nothing further to add, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

Pursuant to Standing Order 97:

That the following Bills be restored to the Order Paper, the:

1. Adoption Bill 2018, Bill No.32 of 2018;
2. Code of Conduct Bill 2018, Bill No. 33 of 2018; and
3. Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018, Bill No. 34 of 2018.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament, the Honourable Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

### **2020 CALENDAR OF PARLIAMENT MEETINGS**

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament adopts the Sitting Calendar for the period February 2020 to December 2020.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak to his motion.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as all Honourable Members may be aware, Standing Order 22(1) provides that the Business Committee must recommend to Parliament a programme of sitting periods for each session of Parliament or each 12-month sitting period of Parliament, whichever is the shorter. In such regard, to ensure compliance to the Standing Orders, Mr, Speaker, Sir, the Business Committee convened and undertook discussions on a proposed Sitting Calendar for 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of all Honourable Members, the Business Committee concluded its deliberations and subsequently agreed and endorsed the Sitting Calendar for the period February 2020 to December 2020, which has been duly circulated to all Honourable Members.

For further information of all Honourable Members, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform that this proposed Sitting Calendar has not only emanated from the Government side. It should be noted that requests from the Opposition and Secretariat to amend the dates in February, August, September and December were duly considered and supported by the Government.

For the benefit of all Honourable Members, as well as the general public at large, the endorsed Sitting Calendar outlines the following sitting periods:

<b>FEBRUARY 2020 – DECEMBER 2020</b>		
FEBRUARY	Monday, 24th – Friday, 28th	Parliament Meeting
MARCH	Monday, 16th – Friday, 20th	Parliament Meeting
APRIL-MAY	Monday, 27th April – Friday, 1st May	Parliament Meeting
MAY	Monday, 25th – Friday, 29th	Parliament Meeting
AUGUST-SEPTEMBER	Monday, 31st August – Friday, 4th September	Parliament Meeting
OCTOBER	Monday, 26th October	Prorogation
NOVEMBER	Monday, 30th November	Opening of New Session of Parliament
DECEMBER	Monday, 7th – Friday, 11th	Parliament Meeting

Mr. Speaker, Sir, similarly to previous years, the dates of the Budget Address and subsequent Budget Debates will be confirmed in due course, and this must and will take place either in June or July.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion before the House does not propose a reduction in Sittings, in comparison to this year's Sitting Calendar. Some may still view this as limiting debates on questions and motions, limiting people's access to Members of Parliament and limiting accountability to the Fijian people. On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it does not take away the role of this august House which is to make and pass laws, nor the role for all Honourable Members which is to represent the Fijian people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, true freedom and democracy is about introducing and having in place laws, policies and programmes that actually empower people in a very tangible manner, and this is through the involvement of people in the Standing Committees' processes and when Members of Parliament from both sides of the House do go out to meet with the people.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform Honourable Members of the House that whilst in discussion to finalise this proposed Sitting Calendar, the Business Committee took into consideration the following factors; the balancing act and the need to look at the work of the Government, given the schedules that are in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is mandated under the Constitution to follow up on its programmes and policies, thereby to ensure that services are delivered to the Fijian people.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has to execute and implement, and that is why we have to be away from the House, following up on such programmes. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is work also in the Ministries and we need to be there to guide the work and this, again, is also critically important for us.

It is in this respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the proposed Sitting Calendar before the House must be supported by all Honourable Members, as it is one that will help us to serve our citizens with honesty, integrity and without fear or favour.

The work of the Committees is critically essential as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the functioning of Parliament and I must acknowledge the Chairpersons, Deputy Chairpersons and Committee Members of the six Standing Committees for the work undertaken to date and we need to keep up with the momentum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the business of this Parliament is not confined only to the proceedings in this Chamber, but rather also takes place in the proceedings of the respective Committees, whether it will be in the Committee Rooms or outside Parliament during public consultations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is envisaged that the proposed Sitting Calendar will allow the real work of the Parliament to continue in the Committee Sessions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am adamant that the Standing Committee Chairpersons and Members of the six Standing Committees are in agreement that this Calendar will allow them more time to look through and scrutinise the pending Bills which have been reinstated to the Order Paper today - Petitions, Treaties and Annual Reports that are currently pending with the Committees, including the ones that will be referred later this week. Mr. Speaker Sir, it is for this reason also that all Honourable Members must support this proposed Sitting Calendar.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the brief salient points I have put to the floor of this august House, I do commend this motion to Parliament and I hereby seek support from all Honourable Members to approve the proposed Sitting Calendar for the period from February 2020 to December 2020, as previously circulated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. The floor is now open for debate on this question. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of Government Business in the House, the Honourable Seruiratu, for bringing this motion on the Sitting Calendar into the House, and I also thank the Business Committee for allowing the change in the February planned sitting and delaying it to the last week, that was my request which came through the Opposition Members of the Business Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Business Committee has agreed with this but you know that it is done on a vote basis, and we would still like to express our reservations on the number of days that are allocated for us to debate on national matters in this Chamber. I believe, Sir, that there should be more time given for us in our deliberations on the various important Bills that come before us and the emergency ones that the Government may bring in through Standing Orders 51.

Now, we are very transparent and are open to scrutiny by the public. They watch us as we deliberate in the Chamber. This morning we will be launching the opening up of the Committee work to the public - to view and listen to. His Excellency urged us in his Address last week, if we could develop more ways and means through the latest technology that we now have, to have more interactions with the people.

There would still be more time needed for us for the open debates in the Chamber, so we have expressed our reservations on the limited number of days of sitting and if it will all be possible for the Business Committee to consider perhaps, another one in October or they can work it out but we need more sitting days and hours for us to debate national matters, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. The Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the 2020 Sitting Calendar. In addition to what the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said, we acknowledged during the Business Committee that some other requests had been adhered to or approved, however, as

mentioned, we are concerned with reduced Sittings. If you look at that Calendar, basically there are about six sittings, minus the Budget and the Budget Debate Sittings. So what we are actually seeing is a reduction in the sittings...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ...even if they are saying there is no reduction, 6 out of 12, do we ask ourselves the question, are we justifying our time as Members of Parliament (MPs)?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- One of the issues brought forward by Government is that they work as Government. So what the Government side needs to realise is that we are also representatives of the people, we were voted in and we are not here as spectators.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- So in that sense because we are not in Government, Parliament is an opportunity for us to bring forward the issues from our people, from our voters. Let me remind the other side of the House ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... that it is nearly 50 percent, just a little bit and we reach 50 percent. So that is why we are saying that six sittings out of the 12 months is ridiculous or unacceptable in terms of the Parliament being a representative forum for the people.

So the other issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are the Government commitments as I mentioned overriding what we come here to present as the representatives of the people. In his last address, His Excellency the President addressed the need for Bills to be passed through in this House, we should note as to how many Bills were passed in the last 12 months as compared to Consequential Bills, and how many of these Bills or laws were taken back to the people for consultation.

We are very concerned about the abuse of Section 51 of the Standing Orders, where Bills are being rushed through without proper consultation, and that is a continuing issue which again brings to light the need to review the Standing Orders, so that there is accountability and good governance in the running of this Parliament. Those are some of the issues I thought I would bring up, and in concluding, we have reservations about these six sittings out of the 12 months. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tuisawau. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.



HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I just wish to contribute to the motion before the House on the draft Sitting Calendar that has been presented by the Leader of Government in Parliament.

I note that we have just passed the motion to revive the three very big Bills that have been consulted: the Adoption Bill, Code of Conduct Bill and the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill. We are going to need time to debate them in the House, I do not think they will be bringing them under Standing Order 51. We should debate them, they have been consulted widely and this is going to need time, and with these sittings before us, there is not going to be enough time to do this, Honourable Speaker, so they have asked for it and we have agreed to that motion, so give the time for this House to debate adequately to reflect the views of the public for and against these Bills.

Secondly, the Leader of the Government in Parliament has also mentioned about the time that the Government needs and that we all need in terms of the Standing Committees to do the work and we need more time for that and less sittings. I do not see that as being justified, Honourable Speaker. I ask the Government, if they so wish to get help from Opposition that they would share the work of the Standing Committees.

Currently, the Assistant Ministers are Chairs of the Standing Committees and we have asked to be Deputy Chairs for Opposition to be able to help in the work and yet they continue to hold those positions as Chair and Deputy Chair. We are here ready to help you, so let us help you from Opposition so that we can share the work and get it done sooner so we can come to Parliament and debate these reports and present them before our people.

Lastly, Honourable Speaker, we have seen the Budget cut for the past year. What does that mean? Less service delivery to our people by our Honourable Ministers in Government so there should be more time filled up by the Government to be available for our sittings, it is logical.

Honourable Attorney-General, welcome back, thank you for joining us in Chambers but, Mr. Speaker, he knows very well that in the meantime while you look for money to support your policies and to run the Government, we need to balance the time that we spend running the Government and also being here in Parliament. Our people deserve to hear from us. We need to not treat them as not very smart, they are actually watching. Our people are watching and following very closely ....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We need more sitting time, Honourable Speaker. This is what we fought for in the Business Committee, so I propose that we have a sitting in January, 2020. From now until February, 2020 is too long, our people deserve better than that. So to that end, Honourable Speaker, I do not support the motion before the House, and the Sitting Calendar as proposed, and I suggest that we reconsider and give more sitting time because our people deserve that. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lynda Tabuya. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I agree with my colleagues that we need to have more sittings, at the minimum - once every month. As Honourable Tabuya has indicated, the break from today until February 2020 is way too long. My concern, Honourable Speaker, is that our people are beginning to lose interest in our Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It is beginning to lose its relevance, and we have the Parliamentary Channel, that must be the most boring in this country. It keeps replaying programmes since 2014 to 2015. So our people are saying, “You can do better than this, why have all these long breaks? Why are laws not properly deliberated upon in the Parliament?”

We have had weeks in this Parliament, Honourable Speaker, where there was not one Bill was brought to the floor by FijiFirst. We have very little sittings and they do not even bring a Bill to the floor for one whole week of sitting. We are here to make laws, Honourable Speaker, and laws take time to be deliberated upon and FijiFirst is most negligent and I have often tried to ask them to follow the example of SDL and SVT ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... where the Party had a Legislative Committee. It was their task to bring two Bills to every sitting of Parliament. You do not even bring Bills to Parliament and, Honourable Speaker, there has to be a reality check on the side of FijiFirst.

In the 2018 General Elections, Honourable Speaker, only 35.6 percent of the registered voters voted for them, 35.6 percent voted for the Opposition Parties and 28.8 percent did not vote. Honourable Speaker, and what separated FijiFirst from the Opposition was a mere 147 votes. Once the Opposition agree to coalesce, FijiFirst is toast. I personally know what it is. Look at the majority in 2014 and the majority in 2018, this Party is toast. I would urge my friends over here now to start looking for another career next year because you are not going to make it back.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- This is why people voted against you - against them, the cavalier manner they approach the Parliament and their responsibilities so, Honourable Speaker, the people of Fiji deserve better and we should look at having a sitting in January 2020: one in August 2020 and one in October 2020. That will do justice to the kind of work we need to do in this Parliament. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just wanted to ask for an amendment to the calendar. If we could shift the February sitting from the week of the 24th to 3rd February because we have some urgent international commitments. As the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's team when they were in the Business Committee meeting had asked for the original sitting date in February to be moved because he has to attend a Breakfast Meeting, I understand in USA. As a result of that we had actually agreed to the move, so I request your indulgence and your goodwill, which is not much, to the week beginning 3rd February till the end of that week.

We have an international ITC Conference in Spain where Fiji is actually being recognised for the enormous strides that have been made and we have to make various representations there. My apologies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, then at the Business Committee Meeting, we were not aware of the dates themselves. We are now aware of the exact dates and it is actually in the week beginning with 24th February. So if we could, with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ask if that 24th sitting date be moved to the week

beginning 3rd February. Mr. Speaker, Sir, just an amendment to that and I request the Honourable Members of the Opposition to do that too.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are saying, “just go.” This is the kind of level of obtuseness we get from the other side, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I was just talking to the Honourable Prime Minister of Cook Islands where they are thinking of bringing an amendment, apparently because they want to replicate what some of the other jurisdictions are doing.

Apparently in some jurisdictions in some of the Parliaments, if, for example, a government member will be away, the Opposition then have one of their members away too, to be able to replicate the absence of one from the other side because that is how they have their parliamentary working in a very cohesive manner. Obviously that is not working because you get comments like that, “just go”.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The reality of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, If I can just comment on what some of the Honourable Members have already said and my apologies for being a bit late this morning, Government has a business to run. Government has many matters to attend to. Government also, at the same time, through its network, through the Civil Service, through the Permanent Secretaries and through the Honourable Ministers are also aware as to what people are thinking, what they want, what they are doing and what their needs are. It is not only the Opposition that has that liberty to do that, nor are they the only ones who have that access.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I would like to also elaborate, His Excellency the President also stated that Parliament is not the only means or Parliament sitting days are not the only means where you are actually able to represent the people’s views. The Committees are extremely powerful mechanisms through which the Members of Parliament actually are able to reach out to members of public. They are powerful mechanisms in terms of accountability, in terms of scrutiny where you have various organisations and statutory bodies appearing before the Committees where they can scrutinise and question them. All the Committees have the liberty to do that.

It is actually quite trite and in fact a contradiction to stand up here in this Chamber and say that it is only through Question time or only through sitting days can there be scrutiny of what is actually happening administratively or politically. It is not the only mechanism. The Committees are extremely powerful and many of the Members of the Opposition including some of the Members from our side actually have been carrying out visits to other jurisdictions and I am sure that they would have known and seen that the Committees there are extremely powerful mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need the Committees to do their jobs, we need the Committees to carry out the scrutiny, the Committees are at liberty to not only sit in Suva, but they can sit anywhere in Fiji they like, where they take Committees, they take Parliament to the people. So it is obviously incorrect to say

that it is only through sitting days can we actually have that level of scrutiny and indeed public engagement.

The other point Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I always find not worth really responding to, but I feel I have to, Honourable Gavoka had mentioned earlier on, “you know, we have only got this percentage of votes”, and I had highlighted previously that in many countries and indeed in the 2006 Parliament when we had the SDL, they actually ran a minority Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the percentage of votes that were received...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...and NFP can testify to this, in one particular year, not in that year but the years prior to that where NFP received about 24 or 25 percent of the votes, yet they did not get a single seat because that was the way the electoral system worked. To come and stand here and regurgitate those figures is actually quite nonsensical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that, we have an electoral system and this is how the electoral system works. And the way it works is that we a majority government and that government is actually carrying out the governance.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The other point I would like to point out to him is, he is absolutely misleading Parliament by saying that the previous Government used to have a Bill every time Parliament sat; it is not true. I am quite happy, tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I had presented these figures previously, to present the number of Bills that were presented in previous Parliaments in one of their term of Government; far low. Far low, Mr. Speaker, Sir!

The other point that I also want to highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that there are a number of Bills that actually have not been attended to by the Committees and these are not even Standing Order 51s. These are the ones that have been put through the normal process, we have to as the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, we now have to roll over these Bills, because the Committees still have not been able to bring back those Bills to Parliament for debate. How can we sit around simply to say, “let us sit and wait for the Bills” when the Committees are not doing their job.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as they would also know in other jurisdictions is, not to come here and blame each other. It is the Committee’s responsibility to solve that matter amongst yourselves.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is your responsibility. And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not about sharing the chairmanship, it is about ensuring the Committee actually sits. If they have issues with any of the MP's from this side of Parliament, they can.....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, if you listen you will learn.

You will need to go to the Honourable Speaker, go to the Secretary-General and sort that out. This is not the forum to sort out Committee issues, it is through the Office of the Speaker or through the Secretary-General to Parliament, so let us focus on the issues here.

(Honourable S.R. Rasova interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No one is blaming the Speaker again, Honourable Rasova.

You should look at how you were posting on Fiji Airways too, I have been noticing what you have been saying.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, misleading information! Again, misleading information, but I will get back to that later on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of the amendment from the movement of Parliament Sitting on the week beginning on the 24th to the week beginning on 3rd February, if we can seek your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General for the amendment. Is there a seconder to this amendment?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Anyone wishing to speak? Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I disagree entirely. It shows a very lack of patience, you come to this House, you should be prepared.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The dates have just been confirmed.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then you come at a proper time. So? Do not come here and waste our time in something that you had overlooked.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, I do not support the amendment to the motion.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Why?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Because it is not the appropriate time to be bringing it in, we are on this motion first.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You can introduce your amendment later, let us complete this debate. May I contribute to the debate, Honourable Speaker?

HON. SPEAKER.- You can contribute to the debate on the amendment. We are in the amendment stage now. After we have dealt with the amendment, then we will deal with the motion; that is the procedure. I hope that is clear.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I again reiterate that I do not support the amended motion. As alluded to by Honourable Nawaikula, this is not the appropriate time for bringing it. Let us deal with the motion that is already before the House and that amended motion can come in later. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there anyone else wishing to take the floor at this time? Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Just a point of clarification there. My commitment in Washington is on the 6th and I would be back the following week, so the 17th would be alright. Is that alright? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am quite agreeable to that. It is just that we wanted that week of the 24th free, so if the Honourable Leader of the Opposition can accommodate that, we can. We have a lot of goodwill, Honourable Nawaikula. You should learn. We need people who know how to consult each other.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Learn, learn! Learn from your leader!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have covered this amendment sufficiently. The amendment now is for the dates 17th February, 2020 to 21st February, 2020 instead of 3rd February, 2020 to 7th February, 2020. Those are the dates.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to attend a very important environment meeting on that date.

HON. MEMBER.- That is what I am saying, take it back to the Committee.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, those are the dates of this amendment; 17th February, 2020 to 21st February, 2020 instead of 3rd February, 2020 to 7th February, 2020.

Honourable Members, you will have to take note that on occasions, we are going to miss someone here which is inevitable. Now, a point was brought up earlier on by the Honourable Attorney-General that when a Member of Government had to attend something, someone else from Opposition would go off, the term is called pairing. That is when the numbers in Parliament are close so when a Member of the Government goes, a Member of the Opposition goes so there is a balance and I had done that in my time when I had been Speaker. There is no problem with that. There is an agreement between the two parties so we can accommodate that but we are looking at the big picture here and the big picture is 17th February, 2020 to 21st February, 2020.

Honourable Members, we will now vote on the amendment:

That the sitting dates for February be changed from 24th February, 2020 to 28th February, 2020 to 17th February, 2020 to 21st February, 2020.

Does any Member oppose the amendment?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the amendment is agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

We will now move on. Parliament will now vote on the question.

The Question is:

That Parliament adopts the amended Sitting Calendar for the period February to December 2020.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	29
Nays	-	15
Not voted	-	7

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being 29 Ayes, 15 Nays, 7 not voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- We will continue with the response to His Excellency's Address and I now call upon the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development, the Honourable Premila Kumar. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and members of the public; my respectful appreciation to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for a wonderful statement during the Opening of the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament last week.

It is really sad that His Excellency the President, our distinguished Head of State has not been spared criticism by the Opposition. His Excellency spoke eloquently about national pride in our Constitution and the growth of civic values. The importance of belonging cannot be overestimated. As Fijians, we build our nation together and are fully invested in its future.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we have been chosen to serve this great nation, and we must put this country and its people first in our words and actions. Let us celebrate the tremendous progress made over the past decade and acknowledge the impact of, if I may quote His Excellency's words; "...our 10-year unbroken streak of economic growth".

Never has there been any acknowledgment and appreciation of the numerous initiatives and projects that this Government has undertaken to uplift the lives of our citizens. There have been frequent attempts to vehemently oppose everything that the Government has initiated or done for the advancement of Fijians and the country.

The rhetoric that deafens our ears has been that the Government's numerous initiatives have been called 'reckless spending' by the Opposition. Is providing free education and bus fare to our children, scholarships earned on merit rather than on race, and loans with favourable conditions so that youth can access tertiary education, really reckless spending? Or is providing social wages to the majority of our citizens, subsidising electricity and water, helping farmers, caring for our disabled people and senior citizens, increasing the income threshold where the majority of earners fall, providing housing assistance and spending on markets, roads, bridges and parks, also reckless spending?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government, under the able leadership of our Prime Minister, has given us a Constitution that treats everyone equally, provides security to all citizens and more importantly, protects our people and *iTaukei* land. Unfortunately, some Honourable Members of the Opposition are so entrenched in politics that they oppose everything that this Government is doing, not based on substance but because it comes from this Government.

There have been rare moments when an Honourable Opposition Member has appreciated Government's work. I was pleased that one Honourable Member of the Opposition had the courage to express his gratitude for what this Government has done for the development of the Namosi Province. Thank you, Honourable Ratu Matanitobua for being honest.

His Excellency the President had eloquently gave an account of Fiji's progress over the past decade. So, please, accept and acknowledge this progress. Yes, more can be done and that is precisely what this Government is doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Parliament will mark Fiji's 50th Anniversary of Independence in 2020. As we look to this milestone, we should focus on shared values and agree that we are temporary custodians of this country. This is our time, but tomorrow will belong to our children and our grandchildren. We are accountable to them.

If we lay the foundation of sustainable prosperity today, the Fiji that they celebrate 50 years from now will be better than we can even imagine. I am committed to laying those foundations through my



ministerial portfolios, and to create opportunities through trade for inclusive and sustainable economic growth across sectors. We will ensure Municipal Councils become performance-oriented, and we will update Local Government policies to make it relevant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will ensure that my Ministries are leaders in digitisation. There is a growing demand for this, especially amongst the 70 percent of Fijians who are under the age of 40. The Government will put more services online to make life more convenient for businesspeople, investors and ordinary people.

The digital Fiji Programme has been very effective. It has brought services to the palms of all Fijians, for example, business registration used to involve a 9 days to 10 days process but can now be done in a few hours. The BizFiji portal is a one-stop online platform that enables investors to obtain information on building permit approvals faster than ever.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government is taking decisive measures to significantly improve efficiency and service delivery mainly through the reform of Municipal Councils, the development of new townships and upgraded facilities, and strategic co-operation with development partners on town planning.

The quality of new leadership at each Municipal Council is redefining service delivery at the Local Government level. Our new teams of Special Administrators across the country, have the energy and the commitment demanded by His Excellency the President. They are driving good governance, the modernisation of local infrastructure and services, and the professionalism of management and service delivery.

The Town and City Councils have devised strategies to collect outstanding rates and will no longer be lenient with those residents, who expect to receive services without paying their share. Councils need rates to invest in maintenance, building, and service improvements. Every dollar paid will be put to good use, and citizens will enjoy the returns in the form of a more liveable environment.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Housing and Community Development was established as a standalone Ministry in 2018-2019, to make efficient progress on delivering accessible and affordable housing. To-date, over 450 families in five settlements have received long-term land tenure in the form of 99-year leases as the first step to meeting their housing needs through the Informal Settlement Upgrade and Formalisation Programme. Work is progressing in another nine settlements and over 1,200 households will benefit.

The Ministry secured 41 development leases from the iTaukei Land Trust Board for that Programme. Over \$3 million has been paid as lease premium, and landowners will continue to receive annual lease rental fees after the development projects are completed.

Over the last five years, 2,321 Fijians have benefited from the First Home Initiative. There has been higher demand for the First Home/First Land Grant assistance, with 336 applications approved in the first-quarter of this year; the entire 2018-2019 period saw just 500 applications approved. Interest in home ownership reflects the confidence of the public and the financial sector in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are unscrupulous slumlords who charge excessive rents, and opportunists who try to take advantage of Government's programmes to grab land from those in genuine need. A stronger and fairer policy and regulatory framework will address this.

A review of the housing policies and related programmes has begun in collaboration with a Housing Policy Adviser from New Zealand. In addition, both the Housing Authority and the Public Rental Board will be restructured to improve service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another initiative on affordable home ownership is through strata title. The Government is working with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to assist in the design and implementation of housing projects under Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement. Six sites in the Central and Western Divisions have been selected for the due diligence to develop green and climate-resilient housing units for low to middle income households in Fiji with private sector participation. The 2019-2020 Budget also proposes several tax concessions to those from the private sector investing in residential housing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated by His Excellency the President, global forces, such as trade wars between economic powerhouses and the slowdown of economies of our trading partners, have an impact on our economy. After all, Fiji is part of the international trade ecosystem. The forecasted global growth rate is 3 percent, the lowest since 2008-2009.

Given this challenge, my Ministry is working closely with countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, China, Indonesia and New Caledonia for preferential market access for Fijian-made goods.

The Australian Government is working on a pilot programme that will look at permanent kava export for commercial purposes by the end of 2020. Recently Australia has completed risk assessment study on breadfruit, which means as soon as the technical details are sorted, we can start exporting fresh breadfruit to Australia.

As His Excellency the President had stated that we should not treat the economy as a political football, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Tabuya have paid no heed to this statement. All that happens from such point-scoring is actually undermining the economy from within.

In light of the global economy slowdown, the Honourable Minister for Economy introduced the pro-growth and pro-business support policies in the 2019-2020 National Budget. The 2019-2020 Budget provides the much-needed confidence in the country's economy. So how can you say that lack of confidence in Government is the reason for slow growth?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that the World Bank Group Doing Business Report has missed on the number of regulatory reforms that was recently undertaken, such as the bizFIJI portal and the areas of getting credit.

It is widely known that the Ease of Doing Business Report's methodology is flawed. However, we have undertaken a commitment to drastically improve doing business in Fiji, and subsequently our ratings.

My Ministry, with the support from the Singaporean Government, is working on obtaining construction permits and starting a business application approval and payment entirely online by September 2020 and September 2021 respectively. Also, there are significant reforms being undertaken to reduce time to obtain business licence in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an investment in youth is an investment in our country's future. My Ministry's Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) provides grants to entrepreneurs that financial institutions are unwilling to support due to lack of collateral. The YES Programme has many inspiring success stories that we had highlighted.

Take Adelene Tutu, 27 years of age, who started getting in Fiji her mobile fitness app, has already had 700 users. Winston Hill established BoxFit Fiji, the Pacific's first boxing gym franchise and 25 year old Leo Vanualailai set up Fiji's first 100 percent locally-owned GIS service provider.

Rinesh Sharma created Introgreen Distribution, combining engineering with agriculture to plant in an ICT-controlled environment. It is no coincidence that three out of four of these examples involve ICT. Our youth must be encouraged to use ICT boldly and creatively.

My Ministry is also introducing the Research and Innovation Scheme for Enterprises (RISE) to support local enterprises and entrepreneurs who carry out research and development and use science to deliver creative solutions for businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tourism remains the mainstay of the Fijian economy. Tourism arrivals have increased by 4 percent in the nine months of this year, compared to the same period last year. Our earnings from tourism in the first half of this year increased by approximately 7 percent compared to the same period last year.

My Ministry introduced an online International Visitor Survey (IVS) this year, following a review by the Ministry and the IFC. This provides real time data for targeted planning and analysis. We also worked with IFC on the recently-launched Assessment of the Economic Impact of Cruise Tourism which quantified impacts and revealed investment opportunities that could inject an additional US\$43.98 million into the Fijian economy over 10 years.

His Excellency, rightfully mentioned that we can create more economic activities by looking inward and at new opportunities. This means diversifying our markets, products and destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite political differences, we can all agree that our nation must have a strong economy with plentiful opportunities for all. A strong economy will free every Fijian child to be ambitious and to dream big - as their dreams will be attainable. We want every child to dream without limits, to access support and training while working hard and to know that their successes will be celebrated and it will inspire others. That is how Fiji can be if we can avoid politicising every achievement.

I once again commend His Excellency the President for his inspiring words at the Opening of Parliament. I am pleased to reiterate my pledge to work wholeheartedly through my Ministerial portfolios and to ensure a bright and prosperous future for all Fijians. *Vinaka vakalevu, Dhanevaad* and God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, the hour moves on, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members, as previously announced, I invite you all to join me for the launch of the broadcast system which will take place during morning tea.

We will resume when the Secretary-General rings the bell. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.38 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.38 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to thank you for your participation in the ceremony that we had during morning tea. We will now continue with the debate on the Address by His Excellency the President and I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula. You have the floor, Sir.

### **DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Likewise, I wish to acknowledge the native owners of the tribal lands that I stand on, mainly to the *Vanua* of Suva, the *Turaga Tui* Suva.

Before I start, Honourable Speaker, let me just remind the Honourable Minister of Economy that the FMIS system of Government has been down from Thursday and that is preventing the payment of the wages of a lot of people, I am not sure whether this has a backup but can you, please, fix it?

I wish to start by congratulating Jerry Tuwai, who is a true warrior of the *Vanua* of Natewa and Fiji, who follows in the footsteps of other warriors from that area, mainly Natewa, Ratu Lota Rakuita, Savenaca Siwatibau, and their success is based on absolute humility and respect, so to Jerry - *vinaka vakalevu, noqu tagane*.

Allow me, Honourable Speaker, at this stage to refer to some of the statements that were made here before this House. The Honourable Selai Adimaitoga claimed that I am misleading the native population of this country through my *Facebook page*. The Honourable Minister should understand that that is the media I use to correct the lies that are coming from that side. You are lying to the nation about the economy, they need to know the truth. You are lying to the nation about the status of human rights in this country, they need to know the State's sponsored abuse of human rights and discrimination against the native people of this country.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You should listen to it, you should read it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And get educated because on this side, I cannot understand how you people on that side can carry on with these lies. I might even suggest, you also read Mick Beddoes Facebook page, he will inform you of this, as well as Suliasi Daunitutu's page, read it, that is the truth, not the propaganda that is coming from *Fiji Sun*, nor *Radio Fiji* nor *TV One*.

This morning I was surprised to see in the *Fiji Sun* the statement by the Honourable Prime Minister made yesterday that, "You cannot steal identity." I wonder who he is talking to. This is a reference to the term "Fijian". It is you, that side of the House, who stole our identity. "Fijian" is the identity of the native people of this country and it is not just the label that you can take from here and post it here. No, it goes with its values, customs and language.

This new identity that you have created for Fiji, "Fijians", what is the language for them? What is the custom? That is the thing, you want to steal the whole of identity to get ....

You have been to the *Air Fiji* cultured "*Bula*", you say, "That's Fijian" for hullo. It is not Fijian, that is our native language and you want to steal our custom and show it off to the world and say, "That is Fijian tradition." It is all wrong, it is you who are stealing, it is you who is the thief all the time.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And another thing that the Honourable Prime Minister said yesterday, he said this, and I quote:

“Real change is not created from a single day’s work, but the deep enduring change that are borne in the minds of our youngest citizens and nurtured over the course of a generation.”

This is clearly a fallacy and I add to that this proviso:

“Change must never be borne out of lawlessness of a *coup* or treason, but must be achieved only through lawful and legitimate means.”

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You supported that in 2000.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It must be lawful and it must be legitimate change, not like the fallacy that you have that side there, and you are trying to impose on us and you are trying to carry on the history as if we will change it. We will never change it, we will never forget what you do.

Then there is another statement attributed to the Honourable Prime Minister just yesterday:

“... it is a blessing that so many of our children and grandchildren have ... true democracy. They do not suffer a government who sees their worth through the lens of ethnicity, gender and religion ...”

It is laughable. That shows a pre-occupation with ethnicity, religion and province that has since become the rhetoric of that side of the House, by a government afraid of the beauty of ethnicity, its religion which is also a human right, permanent and inevitable and nevertheless beautiful and diverse like a rainbow.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You need to learn.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I think you are too young.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You need to know more from us who are experienced.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Too young and inexperience and that is why we have this problem after 13 years - no money.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No money!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You're a joke!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is not the point, the point is principle.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There were other statements made this morning by the speaker who spoke before me, Honourable Speaker, and he was talking about this 10-year unprecedented growth. That is not unprecedented! It means that the other side of the House do not learn from history.

You know, in the 10 years that Ratu Mara was in government - 1971 to 1980, the growth was 4.85 percent and for your Government, 3.18 percent, but with a lot of gap.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is from Government source. That is from the Government, it is not from me.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Quote the whole 10 years.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So that is the problem with your side.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Do not pick up one year only.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not a lie, it is you who is lying, you are lying on the status of our economy.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Ask all the Ministers there, how many capital budgets are on hold? All, because there is no money in the treasury and you are going off to borrow from the World Bank, so that now, we are classed with the poorest. Do you want that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What are you talking about?

(Chorus of laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am talking about your uselessness.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We have had enough. This country has had enough with that loss. They are evil, there is a lot of devil in them. They need to be exorcised.

(Laughter)

HON. MEMBER.- Cartoon.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Wow, you're a cartoon.

Honourable Koroilavesau said yesterday that we need to work together, with nothing in the pocket?

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We need money first then you can work.

Now back to the speech, Honourable Speaker. At the outset, let me reiterate that we are now living in an extraordinary time with extraordinary challenges. It is unprecedented now with the breakdown of law and order and an economy that is in crisis - on its knees, and sponsored abuse of the rights of the indigenous people and discrimination against them by the State, and it is compelling to note that there is now a deep division among our people brought about by the FijiFirst Government in its attempt to cling to power. They should seriously review their policy in what they say, instead of bringing people together; they are deliberately creating animosity among our people.

Honourable Speaker, sitting through the President's speech of 40 minutes, I felt that it was rather hollow and condescending. The comment came from that side that he did not escape criticism from this side of the House. Why? Because of your fault. Those are the false information that you filled His Excellency and His Excellency was forced to say that, but all lies about the economy, about human rights, about the status of everything about this nation. So we need to correct it and that is what we do from this side of the House.

The Honourable President was grandstanding the supposed achievements of the FijiFirst Government and to outline its programme for next year, but the hollowness of it all comes from the realisation that on the ground level, the public are better informed now to know that a lot of what the President was saying was not true.

In fact, the President's address was a vain and painful attempt to hide the truth. In as much as he tried to, the President's speech cannot hide the fact that the nation is in a hopeless situation. The economy is in crisis. There is a breakdown of law and orders. Drug incident is increasing, sexual crime is increasing, rape is increasing and even assault on the Police. Those are the facts on the ground and what was said here did not reflect that. That is the whole point of why we are here, to correct all that.

There is rampant abuse of human rights including indigenous rights, workers' rights, media freedom and abuse of personal liberty. You know that 16-year old: abuse of his liberty. What happened? There has been no constitutional redress; all swept under the table. Freedom from torture and degrading treatment. We only make a lot of rhetoric here and we send a delegation to Geneva to hide all that but the people are not blind to know the truth.

Right of assembly, every time you apply, the Police is saying, "no, no, no".

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Not true.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Where is human rights? What are we doing in Geneva? Why do you want to lie to the United Nations and to the world about the correct situation that is happening here?



(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You cannot hide it, no matter how much you do it and worst of all, Honourable Speaker, there is sponsored of human rights and discrimination against the native population of this country.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You listen! This is the truth, you want to learn the truth? The truth is, thanks to your 13-year rule, the Government is now on its knees. You cannot hide it. Crawling, like this here.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Begging for air, trying to put his hair above water, all because of your mismanagement.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What should you do? You should resign or go for elections. We want a new mandate. We do not want them anymore, they should be out because they had mismanaged the economy.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are a joke!

(Laughter)

If they cannot resign, Honourable Speaker, the least that they should do is to have a revised budget. Why I am saying that because you do not have any money in the coffers to pay for Government programmes. You do not have anything.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well you ask your Ministers, what do they have? All the time we ask this Minister, that Minister, they say, "Wait from the Ministry of Economy." But the tap at the Ministry of Economy is dry.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is like the Ministry of Economy is holding the pot and ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... all the Ministers are lining up for water, holding their hands like that but there is nothing, and that is one example.

Financial Management Information System (FMIS) since last Thursday, normally if you have a programme to process this pending, you should always have a backup. So, maybe there is no money in there too.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I am asking you now, what is wrong?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I asked the Honourable Minister the last time about delay in these capital projects on dredges, the answer he gave was, Honourable Speaker, Sir, "do not worry, there is money coming from other countries".

I am not talking about that. I am not talking about money coming from the aid, I am talking about the money approved here from the Budget; there is nothing there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And you are on record, he is on record to say that there is no money to do dredge works.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You do not have the money, you are relying on aid. They are all relying on aid on that side because there is nothing in their pocket.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Alright, you can answer it. Where is your money? You do not have any money too.

(Laughter)

That Honourable Minister is not doing his work - \$24 million. Honourable Speaker, there is \$24 million owing in rent to that Ministry, the Ministry of Lands. He is not doing anything. He should be sacked. He is sitting on \$24 million worth of income belonging to this nation.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There is no money. He is not doing any work. It has been millions after millions compounding itself every year, so he is not doing his work and that is what I am saying here, mismanagement for 13 years. He should be out.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- More on the economic crisis, Honourable Speaker. On page 4 of His Excellency the President's Address, he said, and I quote:

“... Fiji's progress over the past decade is owed to 10-year unbroken streak of economic growth. ... our development partners all hold promising projections for our economic expansion in the years ahead.”

I find it totally hard to reconcile this with what is currently on the ground and I am not even an economist, I am only judging by the things that move. There is money going this side but there is money stopping there; nothing, empty.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In August of this year information came to me from the Budget Team, that side. They told me, “Niko, this Government has no money.” And what the Government needs to do is to slash its budget by \$1 billion then only can it get a loan and other things. At that time that was about July there was a moratorium, \$30,000. Every Ministry and Department cannot use more than \$30,000 because there is no money in the pocket. And it was proved here in this House during the Budget with the whole cut backs; cut, cut, cut. Ministry of Health, cut; Ministry of Lands cut; Ministry of Agriculture cut and Ministry of Education, cut.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Everywhere cut.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But that is not a surprise. What is surprising is that even with those cuts and given its approval after the Budget, come August we still have no money. That means that what we were budgeting with was only in figures. There was nothing there in the basket and there is a proof of that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Empty basket.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, it is an empty basket and there is even proof of that. The Minister of Agriculture admitted that he has no money to do his dredge. The Ministry of Education announced reduction per capita primary and secondary. And even now I challenge you, Honourable Minister for Education that a lot of your capital projects are on hold because there is no money in your pocket. Same as our view because you rely on the tap, but there is nothing coming out of the tap.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Honourable Member needs to be reminded to talk to the Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Now, let me get onto him.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Chief Executive Officer of the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is on record saying that there is no money for the rapid fixture of our potholes in the Central Division. And he is even blaming the economy. The CEO says the economy does not have the capacity to attend to the roads.

Still on roads, Honourable Speaker, in August even the payments were delayed for Dayals in Ba, they had to go back to the bank and restructure its loan because there is no money coming from there. They cannot pay them. You cannot pay the workers, the contractors.

HON. MEMBER.- There you go again.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Lomanitoba Company - \$10 million, Hot Spring - \$5 million owed and Flame Tree Company was recently forced to repatriate 30 of its workers. They came and begged the Honourable Minister for payment, but there is nothing. They have to look elsewhere to pay for their workers.

All of the above are happening clearly shows that the Government is still without money, even after the August Budget, and even now we have a moratorium (ceiling). It applies to you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in this Parliament, you cannot spend so much more in a week and I think the moratorium is \$30,000 or \$40,000.

Honourable Speaker, the clearest evidence of our economic crisis is this and this is proved beyond reasonable doubt by the \$139 million from the World Bank. That is a small piece of oxygen; a small piece of oxygen to try to put a plug on a big hole, you cannot do it. When the tap runs out and the line is long, what do you tell them? Nothing? We have to change the government. We have to chase you out, we do not need you. They have done nothing, they are evil and as I said there are too many little devils in themselves. They need to be exorcised, that is why.

Honourable Speaker, I now want to speak about the....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I do not listen to you, I listen to the Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He has not said anything, so I can talk.

(Laughter)

Honourable Speaker, let me talk about the State sponsored human rights abuse and discrimination against Indigenous Fijians.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have gone beyond your 20 minutes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, families and friends. *Ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good afternoon to you all.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion before this august House by the Honourable Prime Minister in thanking His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote for his gracious Address during the opening of the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019. I am greatly inspired by his words of wisdom and truly believe that the way forward is through team work and preaching the proven power of unity.

Mr. Speaker, and before I may go any further, I, together with many Fijians would also like to congratulate our Flying Fijians for the win over the Barbarians in an entertaining encounter at Twickenham over the weekend. It was indeed a proud moment for all die-hard fans and I wish to thank all the Fijian supporters who turned up in numbers at the Twickenham Stadium to support our warriors.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is only proper to acknowledge our Heavenly Father for his never ending love. I thank Him for his faithfulness and for always watching over us. I thank Him for he truly cares and He is our protector and comforter in times of need and whatever the circumstances may be, we can only find peace in Him that passes understanding. I thank Him for guiding me safely to my second year in this Parliamentary term, for without Him, I would not have reached this far and day.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his good leadership and the wonderful work he has done for our country and I can only wish him much of God's blessings as he continues to lead us forward to a brighter future. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank my line Minister, Honourable Parveen Bala, the Ministry of Youth and Sports Permanent Secretary, Director and staff for their unwavering support. Thank you to all dear colleagues for your dedication. Thank you for taking each challenge positively and I believe that without your perseverance and commitment, the Ministry of Youth and Sports would not be able to carry out its programme. I wish to thank my family, relatives, all the youth and everyone for their moral support.

Mr. Speaker, I too was very much impressed and proud of those Fijians who took part in the "Our Constitution Challenge". Not only did they share their views on our Fijian Constitution but also showcased some hidden talents and the passion they have on the work they do. Like Pamela, Jemima and Seruwaia my favourite part also of our Constitution is on the Rights of Children. Under our Constitution, our children are protected, cared for and empowered to become good Fijian citizens.

Mr. Speaker, children's rights are paramount. It is our duty as citizens of Fiji to protect our children and parents are to play the key role. With proper upbringing, empowerment and divine intervention, our children will become better citizens of tomorrow and we would not be experiencing problems faced by our youth today. Mr. Speaker, I take this time to thank and commend the Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL), an international peace organisation with branches in 170 countries, with the work they do in promoting peace.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to commend the role of the International Youth Fellowship (IYF), an international NGO, raising leaders with a global insight through youth education, activities and provide realistic solutions to problems in the global village.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak on my recent trip to Korea to attend the National Saemaul Leader's Convention 2019 from 27th October, 2019 to 29th October, 2019. Saemaul Undong refers to any community development movement, which builds a village or community to improve villagers' quality of life based on the spirits of diligence, self-help and co-operation, and approaches by the villagers, of the villagers and for the villagers. With the implementation of this concept in both, rural and urban

communities, it will prepare our youth and children in the well-keeping of our environment and wellbeing.

The Saemaul Undong concept is very similar to our *solesolevaki* concept. Both, requires teamwork and co-operation by our community, especially our youth, in working towards a better Fiji. I must thank my line Minister for allowing me to attend the Summit and also the Fiji Embassy Ambassador to Korea, Madam Lalabalavu, the First Secretary and their team.

I wish to thank the *Mata ni Tikina* and Silana Village Headman, Mr. Sanaila Rokotuivuna, for taking the lead role in the implementation of the Saemaul Undong Concept in his village of Silana, Tailevu. I encourage each Honourable Member of Parliament to adopt this Concept, as it will bring forth change within our communities and a change in the mindset amongst our children and youth.

Mr. Speaker, similarly the *solesolevaki* concept is currently practised by many youth groups across the country. These two concepts, if adopted and implemented by our communities, will solve issues of poverty, hunger and littering.

I take this time to commend the youth and faith-based groups, villages and schools, whom have taken the challenge in improving their standard of living by adopting the *solesolevaki* concept. A big *vinaka vakalevu* to the Burelevu Youth Club, Nawaikama in Gau; Rauraumala Youth Club, Kavula Village, Lekutu, Bua; Qauia Volleyball Club in Lami; Rokovuaka Village Youth Club in Ra; Seventh Day Adventist Youth Groups; Kama Youth Initiative in Buca, Cakaudrove; Sacred Heart Primary School; Namoli, Noikoro in Navosa; Nuku Secondary School in Serua; Pigmies Youth Club in Lautoka; and many more faith-based and village youth clubs which I am not able to mention their names today. These groups have worked together as a team in supporting its members and also raising funds to finance their community or income-generating projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to highlight the 'Vuvale Partnership'. This partnership with the Australian Government affirms our shared ambition to use this connection as the basis for a new higher level of co-operation. Such initiative by the FijiFirst Government can only bring about positive outcomes for our people, and we have seen the positive response from those who have left our shores for engagements in Australia. This partnership has opened up a whole new horizon for young Fijians and the immense employment opportunities it has provided.

The partnership has also strengthened our people-to-people link and deepened our economic relationship. Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji will also benefit from an enhanced security co-operation and the fostering of closer institutional linkages in support of strong and inclusive societies.

Mr. Speaker, the empowerment of our youth remains a core responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In empowering our youth, we offer second chances to young Fijians who have dropped out of the formal education programmes due to the circumstances affecting them.

I am glad, Mr. Speaker, that there is also an avenue where those youths can tap into to continue their education, and the programme contributes to the empowerment of our youth, to enable them a more secure and brighter future.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the efforts of the Principal and teachers of Nabua Secondary School, who volunteer their time in helping our youth. The Matua Programme has, over the years, effectively been giving second chances to our school dropouts, many of whom have been able to further their secondary education and have moved on to tertiary institutions to pursue their career.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to mention here in this august House the efforts of our Ministry in mitigating against the effects of climate change.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports, through the environment arm of the Organisation for Industrial, Spiritual, Cultural and Advancement (OISCA) Fiji, currently conducts a number of climate-related projects around the Western Division as part of its climate change module that it teaches the youth who are enrolled into the Organic Agriculture Programme of the Youth Training Centre in Nasau. These activities include; coral restoration, mangrove planting, reforestation programme conducted in the highlands of the Navosa region, waste management programme, children forest programme which targets primary school students, and community forest programme which targets specific communities along the coast of Nadroga/Navosa and the Ra Province.

This project is envisioned to provide the missing link to the programme through the integration of youth into these environmental programmes via the establishment of the Youth Coast Care Club, similar in structure and administration to existing youth clubs. However, this particular concept focuses specifically on the conservation and preservation of the geographical areas 50 metres immediately from the coastline and 200 metres immediately towards the sea from the coastline. By integrating the Youth Coast Care Club concept, youths will be further developed to take pride of their inheritance and heritage and learn various sustainable ways to manage their coastal areas.

Mr. Speaker, to put it simply, the project aims to bring together youths in coastal communities to appreciate, realise and value their natural resources and understanding how the ecosystems are interlinked, that is, whatever happens on dry land will affect the coastal ecosystems.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, His Excellency the President has reminded us that our ultimate duty as Honourable Members of Parliament is to the people who sent us here. He further mentioned that we are still a developing nation and we still face great challenges of geography, the worsening fury of a changing climate and the uncertainty of changing markets.

In this Chamber, we as Honourable Members of Parliament will have to deliver the solutions to those great challenges. We must work together as a team and support Fiji's long-term economic growth and sustainability, and serve as guardians of every Fijian's wellbeing. We must speak in the national interest and not for our individual or Party interest. We can only hope for a better future, Mr. Speaker, and in doing so, we have to work hard and collaboratively now to ensure our visions for a brighter future is realised. Thank you, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Nagata for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the next speaker, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, protocol dictates that we thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address. But I lament the fact that His Excellency's image as a symbol of national unity has been shattered by Government's spin doctors, who compelled him to outline falsehoods and fabrications to camouflage the colossal failures of this Government.

His Excellency was made to portray our six year old Constitution as the set of rules that was turning Fiji into a land of milk and honey, a Constitution born out of authoritarianism, absolute dictatorship, the trashing of a Fiji Court of Appeal judgment and the burning of a Draft Constitution that had semblance of legitimacy due to the work of an international constitution expert, who went and consulted the people.

The 2013 Constitution was imposed on the people of Fiji, having been drafted by mysterious personnel behind closed doors, in an environment where all political parties were suspended under the pretext of being made to re-register, and all processes put in place for the now trashed draft confined to the rubbish dump.

Under this imposed Constitution, we have the right to fair treatment if we are suspected of a criminal offence. So how is that a 16-year-old boy can be taken away by Army officers and tortured? How is that the boy's torture can be justified by the Commissioner of Police under Section 131(2) of the 2013 Constitution? How is that a young man can end up in hospital after boiling water is poured on his back?

Under this imposed Constitution, we are told that we are all equal before the law. But how is it that some people in this House are able to avoid prosecution for assault, while others who provided the evidence, lose their jobs?

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Under this imposed Constitution, we are told workers and unions have the right to organise and participate in union activities. But why are they never given a permit to march in support of their rights?

Under this imposed Constitution, we have the right to freedom of expression. But how is it that the majority of our people are too afraid to speak up and criticise this Government?

Under this imposed Constitution, we supposedly have the right to a just and fair minimum wage. But how does this Government expect our workers earning a weekly minimum wage of \$120.60 at a rate of \$2.68 an hour in a 45 hour week to survive when Government's own Household and Expenditure Survey of 2013/2014 established an average income of \$55.12 per adult or \$220.48 for a family of four. And mind you, that determination, Mr. Speaker, is as old as this Constitution and the cost of living has since risen stratospherically.

His Excellency the President's Address said nothing about the problems faced by the ordinary people of Fiji. We have problems with increasingly violent crime. We are now at the point where foreign governments fear that the main streets of Suva are not safe. We have seen an upsurge of crimes against Police officers. Domestic violence continues to be rife and drug use is clearly on the increase.

His Excellency was absolutely spot-on when he said, and I quote; "The quality of our leadership in these formative years will be defining for our political system." Mr. Speaker, Proverbs 11:14 warns, and I quote: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."

The Honourable Prime Minister has failed this country because he has not listened to counsel, preferring only to listen to his right-hand man. I once said in a speech that pride comes before the fall. This Government is caught in the hubris or power, arrogance and self-confidence.



What I believe we now have before us is a precipice towards which we are rushing. And the captain of the ship, that is, Fiji, does not know how to tell his passengers that we are headed for sure catastrophe. He is, in fact, steering us directly towards the rocks. That is, when he is actually in the wheelhouse.

His Excellency spoke of the praises heaped upon the imposed 2013 Constitution by members of public, in particular, I quote: "The right of information enhances civic and engagement and lends transparency to our democracy." In a true democracy, this would be the case, Mr. Speaker, but Fiji is not a democracy. Just because we had an election does not make us a democracy. Fiji's two-men rule, or may be one-man rule, makes us a dictatorship, where the right to information is just an empty phrase.

Right to information; let us start with Grace Road. Like any patriotic Fijian, I was disgusted with what I saw in the *Al Jazeera* expose. Mr. Speaker, this cult made headlines around the world last year after major international news network like *BBC* and *CNN* broadcasted video footage showing the cult leadership physically attacking and abusing followers.

Fiji is where the assault occurred, and the Fiji Police and Fiji's Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) did nothing. Of course, we in the NFP know only too well, if there is a complaint of assault, the Police and the DPP can do nothing. But, let us look at what we have.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- A cult that uses violence on people in Fiji. A cult leader who mocks Fiji people. So, who was going to speak up for us, the people of Fiji? After all, if you are not a Fiji citizen and you criticise the Government, like Fiji-born Dr. Brij Lal, you are sent out of Fiji on the next plane. But if you insult Fiji's people and say that you will enter politics to take over the Government, then our Fiji Government has no problem with that apparently.

*Al Jazeera* asked the Honourable Attorney-General for an interview and he declined. They asked the Honourable Prime Minister, he was also unavailable. These two gentlemen are very familiar with Fiji's TV cameras, so what was the problem with *Al Jazeera*'s? *Al Jazeera* asked Investment Fiji for an interview. Investment Fiji said that they had been told they could not speak up. Who, I wonder gave those orders?

In Fiji, Mr. Speaker, we have a Foreign Investment Act and under the Foreign Investment Act and Regulations, cafes and bakeries are reserved activities. So how do the Grace Road's Snowy House cafes operate in Fiji? How do their Pacific Patisserie bakeries operate in Fiji?

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Are these activities not reserved for Fiji citizens? What are they doing, basic work, working as cooks and wait staff? Why are they doing that when Fiji citizens should be paid to do this? We know that Grace Road has a construction company and we also know that this construction company has worked for government.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say to the Government, you say you are a Government that is transparent and accountable, so tell us, what is the real relationship between Government and Grace Road? Let me say one more thing to the Government, Mr. Speaker, and I say this with the authority of my leader and my

Party, an NFP government will ensure a thorough investigation into Grace Road activities will be conducted.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, His Excellency did not address the hard drugs which have infiltrated our city schools and communities. Our porous borders have over the past 10 years allowed criminal elements to flood Fiji with their cancer. So instead of strengthening the powers and resources of our border control by way of the Navy and Customs, we had millions of dollars in freebies given away last year before the Elections.

Customs and the Navy should be patrolling our far-flung islands more than then can currently do. These cartels are probably just dropping off drugs on isolated islands, showing up at ports of entries to go through the customs and immigration checks then going back to the hidden drugs to carry one with business as usual.

Cases of detention and torture are unprecedented. We should not be surprised, the culture of bullying is well and truly alive and I dare say even aided by the behaviour that they see from those who have sworn to serve and protect and even from their own leaders!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- The only thing that is unprecedented under this Government is the rise in violent crime, murder, drug abuse, human trafficking and environmental damage.

Mr. Speaker, like many law-abiding citizens who are concerned about the increasing lawlessness in our country, I am appalled that the Police Commissioner sees the Army or the Police Force as a solution to the recent spate of violent attacks against police officers. Arms of any kinds are designed to kill, maim or injure. Arming the police can only be seen as a further attempt to militarise our Police Force which is inconsistent with the role of police to protect citizens and prevent crimes.

Mr. Speaker, violence only breeds violence and more violence as we have witnessed in our recent experience of armed violence. I draw your attention to a 2016 Report by Amnesty International titled "Beating Justice: How Fiji's Security Forces get away with torture." The Report documents the cases of young, mostly *iTaukei* men being killed or tortured by military or police officers in custody following the 2006 coup.

The Report acknowledges that "an ingrained culture of torture, thuggery, abuse and bullying has taken root amongst Fiji's Security Forces" through beatings, torture and other forms of physical and sexual violence by uniformed officers. The recent media report of a young man in Navua who was burnt with hot water by the police to force him to confess, which the Police Commissioner has vowed to personally investigate, is a recent example of police brutality.

The Prime Minister himself had acknowledged the persistence of this '*buturaki*' culture of beating when he opened a regional workshop on the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel and Inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" in Natadola in 2016, using the example of police inflicting the '*buturaki*' culture to extract confessions from criminal suspects.

I shudder to think, Mr. Speaker, the lethal combination between an armed police force and the 'buturaki' culture of violence that is already being practised.

The New Zealand Police Force is currently trialling armed response teams for six months to deal with serious firearms related call-outs. However, this has soon developed into dealing with whatever incidents of offending they come across, including low-level offending. Similar situations or worse could develop here in Fiji with our police armed. There is also the danger that police with arms could target vulnerable members of our population who are already marginalised in police operations.

Furthermore, arming the police can increase the potential for inter-service rivalry between the different branches of the security forces, as witnessed in the lead up to the 2006 coup, when the military moved to confiscate arms belonging to the police. Such a risky situation could be catastrophic for a small nation like Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, given the increase reports of attacks against police officers, there is a real danger that in violent situations, these weapons can be seized and used against the officers themselves placing their lives and those of innocent bystanders in greater harm. Arming the police is not going to solve the problem. Morale is low in the Force. Perhaps if police officers worked under better, more fair conditions, perhaps if the police had a career police officer as the Police Commissioner instead of someone from the military imposed on them by this regime, things could be better in the Force.

Prevention is better than cure, Mr. Speaker, and with our current volatile situation of lawlessness, we must prevent opening Pandora's box of evil upstream by choosing the default solution of arming our police because we lack the capacity and resources to deal with the consequences downstream. I, therefore, strongly oppose any attempt to arm our Police Force.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General loves to berate the Opposition on what he terms an obsession with ethnicity. But, I put it to this House that it is he that has an obsession with ethnicity. The role of racial and ethnic data collection in eliminating disparities is well known just as it is well known that these data are vital markers that are used to better identify and understand risk factors in a population.

I want to use diabetes to highlight the absolute need for ethnic data to continue to be collected and published publicly in Fiji.

In Fiji, in 2018, we had the highest mortality rate from diabetes according to global life expectancy ratings. Many diabetics put off seeking medical attention due to denial about their condition which results in diabetes-related complications by the time they do go to the hospital. Also many prefer to approach traditional healers, delaying medical treatment. These factors necessitate greater community education. Different ethnicities have different diets and social habits, and so the fight against diabetes has to improve data that is specific and relevant to each group in our communities.

Calling us all Fijians does not magically make us all the same. This Government because of some mysterious reason, known only to the Honourable Attorney-General, continues to bury its head in the sand about the dire need for desegregated data along ethnicity in the fight, not only against diabetes but other diseases and social problems, family debt levels, unemployment, education levels, domestic and sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and the list goes on, to be made public.

Data on ethnicity is universally accepted as a vital tool for development. It does not need to be divisive which seems to be an irrational fear of the Honourable Attorney-General. If there was a need to assist a particular ethnic group in terms of economic development, it does not mean you are favouring

one particular ethnicity. It is important to bring others up who are behind so that we can all be moving forward together.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General have gone on record to say that they want Fiji to be the Singapore of the Pacific. Are they aware that Singapore collects data on ethnicity during census and that it is easily available online? I wish to direct the following questions from His Excellency's speech to the Government Members. Are you speaking in the national interest or are you speaking in the interest of self or party? Are you advocating to advance our people's collective good or for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many? Are you speaking the truth or are you bending the truth to serve a political end?

His Excellency said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have made education free. Mr. Speaker, any parent, grandparent, guardians including all the siblings looking after their younger brothers and sisters will tell you that nothing could be further from the truth.

His Excellency said, "We are shielding and empowering those who are vulnerable", well, please, help people like my friend, Nilesh Pillay, in Lautoka who is hearing-impaired and works hard trying to highlight the plight of hearing-impaired in the face of a national culture that is impatient and unsympathetic to their everyday struggles with the process that we, the hearing, take for granted.

His Excellency said, "We are on a daily basis creating transparency across the business of Government", then tell us, what is the connection between Grace Roads and the Cabinet? Tell us the truth about the economy. Tell us, who the local shareholders of FreeSouls are?

His Excellency said, "We have ratified all nine of the core Human Rights conventions", ratification is useless if not followed by real adherence, monitoring and reporting to Parliament via the standing committees responsible.

His Excellency said, "We are investing historic sums to expand the services and infrastructure that lead our people to higher standards of living - historic sums of borrowed money. The Fiji National Provident Fund is being treated like a cash cow as domestic borrowing balloons this financial year by a maximum of \$1.1 billion and the majority of borrowing will be local, obviously from FPNP through bonds and promissory notes as well as through the sale of 20 percent shares of the Energy Fiji Limited (EFL).

His Excellency said, "So much of Fiji's progress over the past decade is owed to our 10-year unbroken streak of economic growth." Tell that to the tourism industry who only this past weekend in an article in the *Fiji Sun* said that 2020 could be a challenging time for the industry. What will be the first to suffer? The biggest part of operating costs - wages. What does that mean? Less hours and pay cuts generally for many workers of the most important industry in the country.

Our economy is, in fact, at its weakest since 2010, according to the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF).

His Excellency spoke about the politicisation of our economy demanding that the Government tell us the truth about the economy is not political football. This is our job as the Opposition to hold Government accountable.

His Excellency was absolutely right when he said, and I quote:

"The Fijian people particularly our young people will not look kindly on any who seek to undermine the economy, their jobs, their investments or their financial security."

Playing fast and loose with economic football has been the game of the military regime and the FijiFirst Government for the last 13 years, culminating in a consumption-driven economy grinding to a halt with projected growth spiralling downwards. The Opposition has been consistently warning Government to change course but the two-man rule and their team have continued to steer us aimlessly resulting in the mess that we are in as a nation.

At the end of his address, His Excellency again highlighted on input from three siblings, all under the age of 8, praising the 2013 Constitution by saying that the favourite part of the Constitution were the Rights to Children because we are protected, cared for and empowered to become good Fijian citizens.

You get on a boat or a bus which shows movies to passengers during journeys, and invariably these movies show gun violence whether by the good guys or the bad guys and the objectifying of women. Children can easily access pornography on their devices. What we are doing about this? Let us start by fixing these with some tangible actions.

Finally, His Excellency spoke about planning being underway for Fiji Day 2020, Mr. Speaker.

Our 50th anniversary of independence, I beg Government to, please, spare us the tirade which usually begins with, "No other Government has ....." Surprise us by making sure that credit is given to where credit is due to previous governments, previous leaders and all that they have done for Fiji. Let it not be the usual hogwash of blame and finger-pointing at previous governments or the chest-beating and empty boasting that this nation has been subjected to *ad nauseum*. Have some shame!

Isaiah 5:21 warns; "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Acclamation)

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

Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.31 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on His Excellency the President's Address and I now call on the Minister for Forestry, Honourable Osea Naiqamu. You have the floor, Sir.

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

Honourable Speaker Sir, I rise to add my acknowledgements to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konusi Konrote for his most gracious and inspiring Address. His Excellency reminded us of how we have forged ahead as a nation creating opportunities and empowering our people. He also reminded us that whichever side of the Chamber we sit in, we are here to serve and progress the wellbeing of every Fijian without exception. His reassuring message should guide us in the decisions that we make in this august House, and I thank him for a timely message especially coming one year into the second term of the FijiFirst Government.

Honourable Speaker Sir, I also wish to acknowledge Almighty God for the opportunity to serve our beloved nation in Parliament and as a Cabinet Minister. It is God's grace that has brought me this far and has enabled me to do my elected duty as a parliamentarian.

I also extend my own acknowledgement to you, Sir as Speaker and as a true Statesman of Fiji. Your unwavering stance in upholding the principles of democracy deserves utmost respect. May Almighty God continue to bless you with great wisdom as you guide and manage the activities of this august House.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I also extend my most sincere gratitude to the Prime Minister, Honourable Josia Voreqe Bainimarama for his unparalleled leadership.

The fact is, since the FijiFirst Government was voted into power, it has opened so many doors of opportunities for all Fijians, and ensured that we move away from any form of discrimination towards equal, fair and just treatment for everyone irrespective of ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or socio-economic background.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has introduced numerous policies and legislations intended to modernize the economy, address good governance, influence global leadership in undertaking challenges such as climate change and among other things, promote entrepreneurship in order to capitalize on emerging issues and opportunities. It has provided free education and more scholarships for our children, improved our health systems and services, built more roads and jetties, provided electricity and water to places that never had access to these services before.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has also brought the world closer to Fiji through digital connectivity. And, importantly, from a natural resources perspective, the FijiFirst Government has, and continues to set its mind towards achieving the critically vital balance between economic growth and sustainable resource management. Honourable Speaker Sir, the Government will continue to encourage economic and social development for all Fijians; no one will be left behind.

That is the remarkable feat the FijiFirst Government continues to achieve; a legacy etched in our history for our future generations to emulate and build on. This unmatched achievement is only under the able leadership of our Prime Minister.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, in only the first year of Government's current term, the Ministry of Forestry has made some notable progress and achievements with its work, which I wish to share.

The Ministry of Forestry is taking a new strategic direction towards achieving real sustainable forest management. It is no longer treating forestry in isolation from the national interest, but, through collaboration, integration, and developing synergies with key stakeholders to achieve our national development goals and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy advocates sustainable forest management in which forests and land are utilised and developed in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil relevant ecological, economic and social functions at all levels.

The Ministry of Forestry is part of the natural resource and land use sector which is crucial for effectively addressing climate change both mitigating and adapting to it. I believe that no other sector holds great potential for synergies to achieve both environmental and developmental goals. A major component of the Ministry's new direction is reflected in Government's renewed tree-planting initiative.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, on 8th January, 2019, the President His Excellency Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konrote launched Fiji's 4-Million-Trees-in-4-Years initiative at the State House. Since then, the people of Fiji and visitors, including the United Nations Secretary-General and many other dignitaries have contributed to planting an average of 100,000 trees per month.

Honourable Speaker Sir, I am most honoured to announce that Fiji has collectively planted one million trees, and more than a quarter-million mangroves within 10 months.

HON. MEMBERS.- Vinaka.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- I wish to thank His Excellency the President for continuing to champion tree-planting in virtually all the places he has visited around the country. This is one of the national initiatives that His Excellency continues to promote including the reduction of Non-Communicable Diseases and the increase in backyard gardening.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I also thank in particular the *vanua* and the landowners in all the provinces for giving their land and agreeing to partner with Government in this tree-planting initiative. I acknowledge the private sector including numerous companies and financial institutions, academic institutions, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, international development partners and individuals for their tremendous support. I wish to convey Government's appreciation to all the people of Fiji for taking part in our national tree-planting programme.

As the Minister responsible for forestry, it is inspiring to see the people of Fiji developing a deeper understanding for and appreciation of the value of the trees and forests in protecting the environment including our soils, water sources and coastal ecosystems, addressing climate change, enhancing biodiversity, and increasing the opportunities for improve socio-economic development.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this tree-planting initiative is also part of Government's responsibility to our children and youth - the future of our beloved nation. It is part of our investment in our young people to ensure that they inherit a safe, prosperous and sustainable country. We all know that without a habitable environment and planet for our children to inherit, all of our work to leave behind a live-able world, let alone to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals will be in vain. But by

working together, and finding a common ground for the future of our nation and the world, we can and will win this greatest battle of our lives over climate change, and leave a legacy we can all be proud of.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, given the seriousness and the urgency to address climate change, the Fijian Government has now increased our tree-planting target from 4-Million-Trees-in-4-Years to 30-Million-Trees-in-15-Years. This new target was announced by the Prime Minister, Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama whilst attending the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York in September. The increased target is part of Fiji's nature-based solutions to the threat of climate change. This should also send a clear message that even though our carbon emissions are negligible, we are not going to wait for highly industrialised countries to take action and reduce their carbon emissions.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Fiji's tree-planting initiative follows on from Fiji's Presidency of COP 23. It is now part of Fiji's continuing global leadership in the fight against climate change.

As a new development, Honourable Speaker, Fiji also intends to monetise the stored carbon in our thriving and expanding forests and mangroves. This new development will result in more returns to the resource owners.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is in this respect that I wish to share another milestone achievement by the FijiFirst Government in as far as creating new opportunities for our people is concerned. I am honoured to inform this august House that the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) has accepted Fiji's Emission Reduction Program Document (ERPD). This document lays out the plan for Fiji to develop its capabilities to eventually trade in carbon.

The preparation for this eventuality will require funding support over the next five years, and I am happy to inform the House that the World Bank has accepted Fiji's ERPD into the FCPF Carbon Fund Portfolio without conditions. This acceptance could see Fiji being the first Small Island Developing State in the Pacific to access carbon and climate-related finance from the World Bank. ‘

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Eventually, carbon trading could bring great benefits to our people and the environment as this means that we could keep our trees standing while also earning some revenue. It is important to note that our tree-planting initiative is not only aimed at addressing climate change and environmental concerns, but also at addressing Fiji's economic development needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 80 percent of trees planted so far are commercial species, like pine, mahogany, teak and sandalwood, this is strategically designed to meet Fiji's timber demands from forest plantation. The remaining 20 percent of trees planted were native trees, apart from fruit and ornamental trees.

The ultimate intention is to protect our native forests so they, in turn, could protect our water sources and biodiversity. Additionally, it is crucial that we replenish the native species, like Dakua, Vesi and Yaka, among many others. I am happy to advise that the Ministry is repositioning itself to coordinate this new planting target, starting from January 2020 when we will try to plant two million trees per year. We have allocated about 60 percent of our staff and both, finances and assets, like vehicles, specifically to achieve this new planting target.

The Ministry has 15 service centres around the country. Where these stations were managed by one or two staff in the past, they will now be managed by an average of eight to ten staff each. In the first instance, this will mean that the Ministry's presence will be felt in each of the provinces and across the entire nation. The Ministry will continue to strengthen its presence according to the resources it is able to muster.



The increased staff will ensure that the Ministry increases its own nursery capacity, and also increase the community nurseries by establishing not less than 100 of these around the country.

The Ministry will train the communities, focussing specifically on women and youth groups to set up and manage their nurseries. We will certify these nurseries and monitor their operations. The communities could sell their seedlings as a form of economic empowerment for the women and youth.

The increased staff in the stations will also better coordinate and mobilise the communities to plant trees. Each staff is being given a certain target of the two million trees per year. They are also being resourced with the Ministry's existing vehicles, to the extent that each station now has a new vehicle.

We have also received computer tablets from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics to help our staff better capture their work, including plotting the planted areas and trees on Global Positioning System (GPS). These are then mapped for monitoring purposes.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the reallocated staff will also significantly improve the monitoring of all harvesting and sawmilling licences. No longer will we allow licence holders to operate without close monitoring and supervision from the Ministry, or for other illegal operations to take place in our forests. This is considered highly important as we need to accurately capture the volume of logs harvested and the volume of timber products from each sawmill in order to have a better appreciation of the real value of our trees and forests, and to ensure the sustainable management of our forest resources.

We need to also eradicate illegal activities as these have resulted in losses to the resource-owners and to the Government. When Government loses, the entire nation loses out on opportunities for development.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, my Ministry also aims to support the forest industry through a number of initiatives. First and foremost, we are considering giving long-term licences as a means to encourage the logging companies to better plan and implement their operations, which my Ministry will monitor very closely to ensure they abide by Fiji's Code of Harvesting and to minimise the changes to our natural environment. The industry stakeholders will be encouraged, through the review of licensing conditions, to replant the areas they have harvested. They could also raise their own nurseries to complement Fiji's tree-planting programme.

My Ministry will soon launch the online application for licences to enhance the ease of doing business in the forestry sector. Where licences used to take months and years to issue, these will now be shorter, provided the applicant fulfils the stringent guidelines, including conducting thorough environmental impact assessment, among other mandatory requirements.

My Ministry will review its legislations and policies to ensure, among other things, the conservation of forestry resources, transparency and fairness in issuance of forest harvesting licences, whilst bringing the Fijian people into fuller and more active participation in socio-economic development at all levels.

In addition, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry is considering options to facilitate a win-win outcome, with equitable distribution of returns for all the stakeholders in the forestry sector. I repeat that the sustainable management of our forest resources is not limited to addressing climate change, environmental concerns and biodiversity, but also to enhance Fiji's socio-economic development.

Where it is considered sustainable for the harvesting of forest resources, the Ministry will ensure that fair returns are given to the stakeholders involved. They include both, the resource-owners and the forestry sector.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the reallocation of resources means that the Ministry has to establish improved relations with research institutions.

Honourable Speaker Sir, His Excellency the President had sought renewed efforts in building a future worthy of our children and the future generation's dreams and aspirations. The Ministry of Forestry intends to ensure that the forests and ecosystems we leave behind contribute to achieving our people's dreams and aspirations.

Honourable Speaker, I am also inclined to respond to the social media comments by the Honourable Niko Nawaikula on the work of the Government. I wish to remind him that he had the opportunity to assist with Fiji's transformation into a thriving economy when he was with the iTaukei Lands Trust Board. Unfortunately, he did almost nothing for the pine and mahogany industries. He should be ashamed of himself.

I also noted that Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua was part of the group of Fijians protesting in one of the Honourable Prime Minister's recent visits to Australia. He too needs to be ashamed of himself for supporting and associating himself with the people, swearing on the streets of Sydney, whom he knows importantly do not add value to Fiji's progress as a nation.

In conclusion, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in response to His Excellency the President's befitting Address, I now take responsibility, on behalf of the FijiFirst Government for ensuring that the children of Fiji and our future generations enjoy our God-given natural resources in an environmentally and economically sustainable manner. The Ministry of Forestry will leave no stones unturned to deliver the FijiFirst Government's mandate towards a sustainable forestry sector.

*Vinaka vakalevu*, thank you, and May God Bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. I now call on the Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; a very good afternoon to you all.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to echo the voice of my colleagues in congratulating His Excellency for his gracious Address. It is a pleasure for me to stand in this august House to respond to His Excellency's Address. He did mention some very important points on which I shall be touching and elaborating on today.

To start off with, let me say that His Excellency raised some pertinent issues for us as Parliamentarians to work on to build this nation as a modernised State, to build this nation not just for us, but for the next generation.

While we all had our personal agenda when we contested the 2018 General Elections, once elected in this august House, we must have Fiji at our heart. We must focus and work for the betterment of all Fijians and not just for one area or one particular group.

We must not forget that Fiji has a very young population. Their expectation and demand would be very different to ours, or it would be even different to what our expectations were when we were in

that young generation category. So it is very important that we need to change our mindset so that it is not just about me or a group of this 51 Honourable Members sitting here. It is about 800,000 or so Fijians.

The decision taken today in Parliament will affect all Fijians and generations to come. Who in Fiji still wants to live in the 19th Century while we are already in the 21st Century? No matter how much we disagree, in this changing world, individualism and independence is taking its course.

Everyone wants to be independent and make decisions on their own rather than being dependent on others. No one desires decisions affecting their professional and personal life to be made by others.

Today's generation wants to be empowered to be independent rather than be suppressed by leaders who work for their own interest or those who believe in the hierarchy system within the society. We need to listen to our people and more importantly, we need to work for them.

It is this Government which listens to Fijians and incorporates their ideas and views while making decisions. I do not want to bring the past in my speech but a simple question for the people to answer. In the history of Fiji, were school students ever consulted during the formulation of a national Budget?

Honourable Speaker, Sir, His Excellency also spoke about the digital platform for committees. As the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Committee and Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee, I welcome his idea that we need to be more innovative with regards to how we can engage with the general public in getting their views and ideas, and having it incorporated in our deliberations.

We have gone around the nation collecting submissions. While we try our best to gather as many submissions as possible, sometimes it is very difficult to do so. The issue is not how far we can reach to engage the general public but in this changing world, people do not have time to come and give in submissions.

I totally agree that through digital platform, we would receive many more submissions to what we are receiving at the moment, as people can engage with the committee from the comfort of their homes.

Both my Committees combined, we have conducted a total of 186 meetings, including public consultations. We have reported back on two Bills and will be reporting back on two more Bills this Thursday. We have tabled more than 30 Committee Reports, inclusive of standalone and consolidated reports. These are significant numbers and shows how busy and committed Committees are.

With technology revolving around us, we should step up to use digital platform at committee stage. I still remember the Secretariat team informing me that message through *Viber* and *WhatsApp* cannot be regarded as formal correspondence within the Honourable Members. I literally had to get it passed in one of the Committee meetings that Honourable Members can communicate via digital platform.

Secondly, I was informed again by the Secretariat when my Committee wanted to have its own social media page that it is not allowed as Parliament has its own website and social media page. Therefore, the idea was turned down. Now that we have been given the mandate by His Excellency to think of incorporating digital platform, I sincerely hope that Parliament will allow the Committees to work on this.

I do understand that Committees are governed by Standing Orders and in the near future, the Standing Orders Review Committee should consider incorporating these changes in the Standing Orders.

Committee webpage, social media and mobile app would be a much cheaper way to reach out to the general public. And not just that, it will give a greater reach for our Committees as well.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, there are hard times and there are good times in life. After a period of hard time comes a period of good time. It seems like the Opposition are sure that they will not be able to defeat FijiFirst in the next election so they are now calling for us to resign. Let us wait until 2022. You will get a chance and face another disappointment.

What is confusing, just like the Opposition, is what Opposition is trying to achieve by asking Government to resign. I just do not understand what Opposition means when they say that nothing seems to be right at the moment. Government is fixing the road, yes, we agree that it is taking some time but, yes, quality comes only if considerable time is spent doing it.

Anyone can see the quality of road works whether it be from Dreketi to Nabouwalu Highway, be it from Martintar to Nadi Airport or Nakasi to Nausori Highway or any other roads in Fiji. Honourable Speaker, Sir, while we are fixing the road, the rain destroying our road does not help.

Honourable Speaker, Government does not come to Parliament and blame nature for destroying our infrastructure. I seriously think the day Opposition comes into power they may go to an extent to blame nature as well just to safeguard themselves. So why should the Opposition blame us for something over which we have no control?

Honourable Speaker, 12 years ago, can we recall how many streetlights were there if we used to drive on either Kings Highway or Queens Highway or any other roads for that matter? Is this not the sign of constant progress? How many people had footpaths in their suburbs 12 years ago, or had footpaths while going to school?

Our children are going to school and parents do not have to pay school fees. Parents do not have to pay for bus fare nor do they have to pay for textbooks. Students are still getting scholarships on merit. TELS is still available for students who want to pursue their higher education at tertiary level, so I do not see where the issue is in the education sector.

Our senior citizens who are above the age of 65 are still getting \$100 dollars if they do not have any other source of income or pension. Poor families are still helped under the Poverty Benefit Scheme so, Honourable Speaker, I do not see any issue in the social sector as well.

Fijians living in rural areas are still being connected to the Electricity Fiji Limited (EFL) Grid or getting power at their place through solar panels. The works are still going on, as announced by our Honourable Prime Minister, that every Fijian family should be connected to some sort of power supply by 2025 and we are well on track in achieving this well before 2025. I do not see any issue in this sector as well, Honourable Speaker.

The 2013 Constitution allows every citizen to have access to clean and safe drinking water and the Government of the day is trying its level best to have more boreholes done through the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources and water catchment through Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) to provide Fijians with clean drinking water distributing water tanks under the Rain Water Harvest Project so that people can store drinking water. So, where is an issue in this sector, Honourable Speaker?

When we look at farmers, they are still being supported through the Ministry of Agriculture. Sugarcane farmers are supported through subsidiary given by the Ministry of Sugar, so where is the issue, Honourable Speaker?

Just as stated above, Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members here should have Fiji at heart and they should not use this space to flourish their personal agenda.

The desperation is booming on the Opposition side. In this desperation, they can go to any extent just to form the next government, even if it means lying here in Parliament and lying to the Fijians outside Parliament.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very poor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is not hidden, Honourable Speaker, from anyone that politics is such that the Opposition will do anything to form the next government. They should do it on their own credential and not at the cost of ordinary Fijians. Blaming government about anything to everything is not right.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I will repeat that, Honourable Speaker, blaming Government about anything to everything is not right. You cannot blame the government if the roads have potholes because of rain.

What should the Government do if people do not care about their health? What should the Government do if people do not want to eat healthy or exercise daily? Everyone here knows that the Ministry of Health is promoting 30 minutes' walk. Let us be honest to ourselves. How many of us in this august House are doing their 30 minutes' walk on a daily basis? So if people do not look after themselves, how can we blame the Government?

Government can make walkways and training centres but Government cannot force people to utilize them. It is the people's own responsibility. People need to take ownership of their health but for the Opposition, it seems like if anything happens, whether it is by accident or if it is nature's call, the government should be held responsible. Please, I urge, try to be realistic.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, NCDs are rising, it is not just because of non-availability of medication. The major contributing factor is the non-compliance with medication. NCDs cannot be treated but they can only be controlled. When people do not care about their own health, it is wrong to stand in Parliament and blame the Government.

People's medical condition deteriorates when people do not take medication on time, when they do not eat healthy food nor exercise. I must say, Honourable Speaker, NCD and its treatment has nothing to do with ethnicity. Why is the government blamed whenever there is a rape or a child is abused? People are mentally sick when they actually perform such act. It has nothing to do with the policies. What government can do is to ensure that justice prevails.

(Acclamation)

This Government is working on making our laws modernised and the laws are designed in such a way that perpetrators are not just penalised but the law should be the hindrance to those even thinking of committing such crimes.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is very easy for the Opposition to stand in the Parliament and accuse the Government but I urge them to take time and think about what they are saying in this august House.

We have an educated population and they are listening. I am not saying what was done and what was not done by previous Government but I am talking about what is being done at the moment and how it will improve our nation. The best thing to do is to invest in our future. What I had mentioned earlier in my speech was very important. We should not be building a dependent society but rather an empowered individual, who enjoys all the rights as a Fijian citizen and not on the basis of his colour, gender, hair texture, race, religion and ethnicity.

We need to entrench this in our children that no one achieves any good by discrimination. One needs to be empowered enough to feed himself or herself and his or her family rather than being dependent on anyone else. This is where our 2013 Constitution comes in and it empowers and protects the rights of everyone who is Fijian. Our Constitution does not discriminate. We at the Ministry are not just sitting silently, we are trying our level best to see that our youths are empowered and therefore we are going to assign youth workers to youth groups.

We are working very closely to ensure the unemployment rate goes down. We would be conducting more than 300 labour inspections next year to ensure that we provide justice to the workers and provide relevant information to employers. We will continue to educate both employees and employers to have a conducive environment so that productivity can be increased at the workplace. This is how and will add value to the country's economy. With these words, Honourable Speaker, I thank you for your time. *Vinaka.*

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Maharaj for his contribution to the President's Address and I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Members of Cabinet, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen and everyone listening or viewing this Parliament Session by radio, television or the live stream online: Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion tabled by the Honourable Prime Minister regarding the Address of His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands in opening the Second Session of this august House a week ago on Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2019.

Before I do so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the House of Parliament sits, the *Turaga na Tui Suva kei na Vanua o Nadonumai*.

Honourable Speaker, I join my fellow members to express my condolences to the Government and the people of Samoa, where 14 children have passed on being victims of the measles epidemic. I pray God's peace upon the deceased children's families and the people of Samoa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I also echo similar sentiments by my fellow Members who have expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve the people of Fiji in my first year as a Parliamentarian. As an Alternate Member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I have seen close up the challenges that civil servants face: the breakdown in procedures and processes year-in and year-out, resulting in wastage of taxpayers funds because of mismanagement, corruptive practices and little or no effort to correct inefficiencies in State agencies.

I acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the billions of dollars that have been spent by Government in its effort to improve the standard of living, the infrastructure, and governance of the nation. However, people have suffered and have continued to suffer due to the wrong economic policies resulting in higher unemployment, higher cost of living, poor health facilities, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the massive Government's failures, mismanagement of economy, the gouging of the people by the FijiFirst Party Government, increase in crimes including the serious consequences of the illegal use of marijuana, meth, cocaine, et cetera.

It is my duty to echo the call for loyal Leader of the Opposition and my fellow Members and call on the Prime Minister, the Attorney-General and the FijiFirst Ministers to resign.

Honourable Speaker, I had looked forward to hearing His Excellency's opening Address and I was dismayed to note the rather political overtones in his Address. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition has articulated clearly the expectations we hold of the highest office of the land, the Head of the State is the fountain of Honour, Authority and Mercy and should bring unity to the nation.

Honourable Speaker, with due respect, the Address did not give the people of Fiji confidence or hope, instead it was yet again FijiFirst Party's broken record or padding their accomplishments and ignoring the elephant in the room.

For my contribution today, Sir, I wish to focus closely on what we, as Parliamentarians, can do if we are able to come together in the interest of the nation.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to look back to the 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in Kampala, Uganda, which I was fortunate to attend as a member of the Fiji delegation which you led. I thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Conference, Sir. The theme of the 64th CPA was, 'Adaption, Engagement and Evolution of Parliaments in the rampantly changing Commonwealth.' We can kick-start the resolution of our national ills if we honour that theme. This requires Parliament to be more than just a rubberstamp of the executive actions.

Parliament must perform its role as a third co-equal branch of Government to hold the Executive and Judiciary accountable and to itself be accountable by the other two branches of Government. With due respect, this means that the travesty of the decision in the September Sitting to let the Prime Minister free and to punish Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, the victim of the alleged assault, should have been corrected by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Police, to charge the Prime Minister for the offence given the DPP decided there was sufficient evidence, the third arm of the State, the Judiciary, would then decide the merits of assault charges on whether double jeopardy applies. It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the State institutions, under the three arms of Government, are now subservient to the *coup* makers of 2006.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to continuing human rights abuses, the majority of our people face economic hardship. The Bureau of Statistics 2013-2014 Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) found 29 percent of our population living below the poverty line and another 20 percent facing hardship under margins of poverty line. That is at least half of our people facing hardship daily. For the rest who have steady employment, wages have been stagnant and cost of living continues to rise, as if increasing poverty and rising of cost of living is not bad enough, Government continues to increase various fees, fines and charges.

It now costs up to \$15 to get a Birth Certificate. Business Licences, Fishing Licences are exorbitant. People are penalised for trying to make a living as Government is so desperate to get its cut of every bit of economic activity. Exorbitant fees and charges are emblematic of a desperate Government and illustration of "killing the goose that lays the golden egg."

Reckless spending before the 2014 and 2018 General Elections have brought us where we are today. It resulted in the massive cut of \$809 million in the 2019-20 Budget. The bill must be paid, Mr. Speaker, Sir and it is the ordinary people who will pay.

Mr. Speaker Sir, after the \$809 million budget cut, we continue to see red flags signifying tough times ahead. The Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) was forced to revise downwards the projected economic growth for this year down to 1 percent two weeks ago. In November 2018, the projection was for 3.4 percent and then in May 2019, this was revised downwards to 2.7 percent, now it is 1 percent. As the Honourable Leader of the Opposition had stated, let us hope it is not going to be a negative growth below 0 percent when the final figure comes in for 2019.

His Excellency the President had focused on the 2013 Constitution and the views of a handful of members of our society. All messages showcased only to support that imposed Constitution – no messages of concern were aired. I suggest that the Department of Information in the next competition ask citizens to express their views on the cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the heart of Fiji's crisis, is that very same 2013 Constitution Decree. Yes, Sir, while an Act of Parliament we have renamed Decrees as "Acts", the fact is that they were not debated in Parliament or tabled by an elected Government. These Decrees, including the 2013 Constitution were imposed by an unelected regime on the people of Fiji. Renaming a Decree as an "Act" does not take away the fact but continues the litany of misinformation and fiction masquerading as reality that citizens are subject to.

As I have stated above, the institutions of the State are now subservient, co-opted and controlled by the *coup*-makers of 2006. They head of the Military, Corrections, Police and Government of the Day. It is unfortunate that they interpret their interest, their political survival as the national interest.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- That is why human rights abuses remain unresolved and why hot water was allegedly poured on a suspect in Navua last week. Despite claims by the Government delegation to the United Nations in Geneva earlier this month, Fiji received a record of 242 recommendations. The most important, 55 recommendations, were not accepted by the Fiji Delegation. These recommendations call for review of draconian Decrees like Media Decree, Public Order (Amendment) Decrees, Crimes Decree, Essential Industries Decree, et cetera.

In terms of *iTaukei*, the continuing disempowerment of indigenous people is an injustice that the FijiFirst Government perpetuate every day. In effect native land has been nationalised with less decision-making power to landowning units, and possible perpetual alienation of their land to Government under the Land Use Decree.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is one of the reasons that the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2012 questioned Government on anti-indigenous decrees and laws. CERD recommended their review and repeal, pending free, prior and informed consent of indigenous *iTaukei*. As a result, the FijiFirst Government has not filed any follow up report on UN CERD. According to the UN Human Rights website, Fiji's CERD Reports for 2014, 2016 and 2018 remain pending. It is therefore unlikely that Government will front up to CERD in 2020 because it does not want to be held accountable for its actions against *iTaukei*. It is my view, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the social re-engineering experiment that started in Year Zero (2006) according to the Learned Attorney-General will not work despite all the decrees to enforce it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Anti-*iTaukei* Decrees prohibits any court, tribunal or any other adjudicating body from hearing or determining any challenge to their validity or any decisions made under those decrees. This is found in the Regulation of the Surfing Area Decree, the Land Use Decree, the Mahogany Industry Development Decree and the Denarau Decree, to name a few. The provision makes a mockery of Section 15(2) of the 2013 Constitution which states, and I quote:



“Every party to a civil dispute has the right to have the matter determined by a court of law or if appropriate, by an independent and impartial tribunal.”

Yet another hollow human right in the 2013 Constitution.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this a breach of the so-called right to equality which FijiFirst claims to have brought on all the people of Fiji. Be that as it may, Mr. 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 for all the people of Fiji against such draconian and unjust laws.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the drug problems in Fiji has reached unprecedented levels. I am concerned with the increasing abuse of *marijuana* and now the more deadly methamphetamine or cocaine in our communities including villages, they now make up 90 percent of addiction cases at St. Giles. I was also dismayed to hear from the regional UNAIDS representative at the Speaker's Debate on HIV/AIDS in Sigatoka that over 100 arrests a month for methamphetamine raises the risk for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a holistic approach is urgently required to address the drugs problems in Fiji. The *vanua, lotu and matanitu* must work together. I urge Government to allocate a budgetary provision for awareness programmes to be conducted for rehabilitation efforts to be stepped up.

I understand that a number of Government Ministries have signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Good News Church of Korea which conducts a series of mind lectures. These lectures have actually changed the minds of hard core criminals, drug addicts through following the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

Honourable Speaker, the Methodist Church of Fiji has also signed an MOU with the Good News Church of Korea. I believe that the *lotu, matanitu* and *vanua* must work together to combat the continuing use of drugs and the serious consequences on families and society as we have all witnessed.

I now wish to say few things about Tailevu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, constituency issues. I also wish to raise the outstanding needs of people of Tailevu on the improvement of supply of clean water in the *Tikina* of Tai and Tai Vugalei in Verata as well as Dakuivuna and parts of Wainibuka. The supply of clean and safe water is a basic human right under Section 36(1) of the 2013 Constitution. There have been continuing calls for improvement of infrastructure including road improvement in Dawasamu and Verata, Tonia Village Road, Tai Vugalei Road, road widening and tarsealing, upgrading of a bridge between Navunisole Village and Waimalua settlement to a higher level to avoid flash flooding along the Waimalua Road near Korovou Town in Tailevu.

There have been consistent calls for the upgrading of both the Korovou Sub Divisional Hospital as well as that in Nayavu, Wainibuka, the construction of Health Centres to replace the burnt Health Centre at Dogo in Namena, Tailevu, the expansion of Verata Health Centre near Naivuruvuru Village, the construction of a Health Centre at Natobuniqio, Vugalei, upgrading of the Mokani Hospital, upgrading of the Vatukarasa and Tonia Nursing Stations to Health Centres.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude, our nation is on the brink and no other Government has displayed such incompetence during its term in government. This side of the House have been calling for a bipartisan approach to solve the nation's ills, but this has fallen on deaf ears. I therefore have no pleasure in echoing the call from this side of the House, in the interest of the nation for the Prime Minister, Attorney-General and Cabinet to resign and for fresh elections to be called for this nation so that this nation can begin the clean-up process.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Of course you are not going to agree, we are calling for bipartisan because we know that you are not going to agree to resign, Honourable Prime Minister.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- You are not going to resign that is why we are continuing to call for bipartisan approach.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I regret that I cannot support the motion before the House. *Vinaka*.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Joseph Nand. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers and Honourable Members of this Parliament, *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good afternoon to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I wish to congratulate and thank His Excellency for the noteworthy Address and vision which I am sure we would all agree gives this august House the course, validation and the stimulus for moving forward together as accountable citizens of our beloved nation with Constitutional rights of ensuring equal access to better and brighter opportunities for all as envisioned by our Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with the provisions of the Fijian Constitution, the Fijian Government led by our Honourable Prime Minister has eloquently and expressively addressed the issues of inequality in our beloved nation. As we embark on the beginning of yet another year of our Government in Parliament, I find this to be an appropriate time to thank and congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister for his visionary leadership in steering Fiji forward with the best efforts to leave no one behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank all Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament for the magnificent work done so far and I wish everyone success in continuing this journey to make Fiji a greater nation amongst nations. We may have had our dissimilarity in methodologies and principles, but at the end of the day, it has all been about getting the work done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by His Excellency that we all, as citizens, have a common identity and as a result of our citizenship having equal opportunity, access to various initiatives and programmes and those underprivileged have been empowered. That is the beauty of our Constitution that translates all of these above.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Government policies and initiatives, education is free thus enabling each and every student to get the best of education and in turn create a knowledge-based society, a society that can be proactive and contribute towards nation building in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by His Excellency, Parliamentary Standing Committees play a pivotal role in ensuring that public opinions are taken into account and given the highest priority upon which policies are crafted to better serve the general populous. It also gives the members of the community an ideal launchpad to engage with the various communities across the nation.

To those who constantly critique the credibility of these Committees need to understand the pivotal national roles they play. A decision by the Committee is not made by one member to make other members happy. We are not there to please a few but to work for the common interest of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, the Government on its *Facebook* page posted the Climate Change Bill 2019 form to directly solicit submissions from those members of the public using *Facebook* as a medium of communication.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by His Excellency, the greater challenge is to develop and embrace a digital platform for online submissions which will not only allow our citizens greater convenience and immediate access to parliament representatives, but improve efficiency and productivity of all these Committees. In a nutshell, parliamentarians shall have greater engagement and collaboration with the members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by the Minister of Education yesterday, climate change has always been an integral perspective of our national curriculum framework. Local knowledge and global scientific approaches to adapting to and mitigating the impacts and irreversible effects of climate change are taught together to empower students with the necessary know-how to contribute to the nation's effort to build resilient communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government has continued to develop infrastructure thus escalating rural development by drilling boreholes, providing clean water and connecting electricity to areas previously without regular electricity supply. Further on, lessons learnt from *TC Winston* as emphasised by His Excellency has enabled us to build stronger school facilities such as classrooms for students and staff quarters as well. This demonstrates that we are building resilience as a nation as part of the network of national infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, worth mentioning is expansion of telecommunication into rural and remote communities whereby our citizens could communicate better with each other, engage with stakeholders of their interest and giving them confidence to contribute towards our nation's development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, more and more roads are built into rural and remote communities as highlighted by His Excellency so that a greater access to markets and goods and services are readily available to rural communities. In doing so, they are able to participate and contribute in the growth of our economy. Also the landowners, due to the development of rural infrastructure and telecommunication are able to utilise their resources namely land to better use, thus taking up a larger role in our nation's development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our young Fijians' efforts are recognised and all scaffolding is done to ensure that they in turn, turn into successful entrepreneurs through various initiatives that gives our Fijian youth to expand their ideas into realities which in turn allows them to contribute to the economic growth thus having a hand in nation building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by His Excellency, our society is now exposed to digital technology whereby cashless transactions are done at ease and this has opened new doors for starting Fijian businesses. The new bizFiji Portal has made it easier for all Fijians to start a business through a transparent process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency is correct in saying that the measures and reforms announced in the National Budget have propelled prospective local investors to take advantage of this and with the right push and proper motivation, we can attract more number of young Fijians to invest in various parts of this country.

The output of education is not only job seekers but job creators too. However, we need to move away from politicising our economy and establish a common working and investing platform so that we can all contribute to our growing economy that will benefit all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we shall shoulder on with the new reforms as outlined and announced. A noteworthy example is the Climate Change Act. Our Honourable Prime Minister has continuously championed to build resilience to climate impacts, both here at home and globally. This has been further cemented by all Fijians participating in the national consultation for the Climate Change Act. Support of our Pacific neighbours is also highly acknowledged and has furthered our course.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as reminded by His Excellency, next year we will mark the 50th Anniversary of our nation's Independence. We must revisit our nation's past and glorify our achievements, as well as denouncing some dark chapters that put some dent in our nation's rich history.

However, as a nation, we have learnt our lesson and under the great leadership of our visionary Prime Minister, we shall achieve more in the many years to come. The Government has ensured that it has provided the right push and proper motivation to work hand-in-hand in making Fiji a success story in terms of a resilient nation for attaining economic prosperity.

Worth mentioning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is our nation's effort in addressing internet and computer crimes. With the online commissions being appointed and tasked to oversee cybercrime, we are given a sense of direction to pursue the Cybercrime Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our young are vulnerably exposed to so much information, how to react to it and handle information powerhouse is up to the awareness created in that area. Responsible use of social media is a challenge that the young generation faces and the way out of that web is only education and awareness.

For those students who will be progressing further in tertiary education, I must remind you that the system is highly competitive and you will need to be on top of your game to be able to successfully achieve your dream career. No one must take for granted their place allocated for international and local scholarships. The money that the Government invests in education from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to tertiary belongs to the people of Fiji. We are guardians of those funds and it is our civic responsibility to ensure that it will be rightfully invested.

Yesterday, there was a strong mention in this regard in the august House and I must remind the nation that the number of scholarships available has been known to the students from the very beginning. The methods to acquire them have been clearly outlined.

In term one this year, the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board (TSLB) and team carried out an awareness-drive, reaching out to students in 160 secondary schools around Fiji which accounts to about

92 percent of all secondary schools. The remaining 13 secondary schools were given a full set of user-friendly resource materials.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since June 2019, there has been a number of advertisements in our daily newspapers highlighting the national priority areas and the number of awards in each category for 2020 available at tertiary institutions.

We are committed to the vision of our Honourable Prime Minister to leave no child behind by availing Tertiary Education Loans Scheme (TELS) to all eligible students who have secured a place at any of the approved higher education institutions. Henceforth, it is the prerogative of the students to put education on top of his or her agenda and secure a place for himself or herself.

Our Government has committed \$387,000 for children who wish to pursue vocational studies. It is time to break the myth regarding technical professions versus white collar jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working to ensure that there is a level playing field in education so that each and every young Fijian is able to not only dream, but also to achieve their dreams. We are providing equal opportunities and we encourage all students to work hard and grasp them. Gone are those days when students would continue to be on scholarship, despite lack of continuity and inconsistency. All scholarships and loans schemes are based purely on merit and non-discriminatory criteria. Every Fijian has equal and equitable access to it.

I am delighted to announce, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Cabinet has approved an opportunity for up to 10 students to study for two-and-a-half years in Australian schools with effect from July 2020. I pay tribute to the Australian Government for helping young Fijians achieve their dreams and I believe this will encourage our students to focus on their studies to be eligible for these scholarships and reach their dreams.

We are working on areas of innovation and I am pleased that we continue to run pilot projects to bring innovation into our schools and engage our young people's minds. We have provided over 30 schools with an offline electronic library. Students can log in via their smartphones at any time and explore learning resources from several countries around the Pacific. This library, produced by Arizona State University, is solar-powered and can run off electricity. In the future, this could be our means to roll out e-books rather than printing new books annually.

We have to bring innovation into our classrooms and to prepare our students for the challenges they will face in adulthood. Due to the costs of technology, we cannot do this overnight as it requires a phased approach. Technology does not necessarily require an internet connection but invariably, they are seen hand in hand.

We are working with *Walesi* to install internet access in schools where no access currently exists. This, we are coordinating with the Ministry of Communications and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to connect as many schools as possible that currently do not have internet access and computers. As part of the Ministry's infrastructure audit, we are also checking the access of schools to internet connection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, education has to be flexible and adaptable. There is, no doubt, that technology has had a major impact on education and, indeed, on the way societies now operate. We are working to pilot smart classrooms in a small number of schools. Our students need to be equipped to work with technology. If we continue to teach them on whiteboards or indeed blackboards, the likelihood of students disengaging from education is likely to rise.

We need to adapt the ways in which we teach to meet the needs of our students, not the other way around. Technology is here to stay and we need to work hard and quickly to adapt and help students prepare for the mass of information available on the internet and to be able to discern fact from fiction, and the National Curriculum Framework is designed to meet those needs and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard much about the need to develop the characters of our students. Education is no longer a function of age, it is increasingly a function of what information to access which is correct. Teaching is becoming more facilitation of learning than actually teaching in a didactic way.

The quality of our schools is dependent on the level of empowerment of our teachers. This is why, Mr. Speaker, we are working with teacher-training institutions to address this important fact. We want empowered teachers who will remove any limits on the ability of our students to learn.

We want to produce students who are adaptable, as a result they can adapt to the future they face and succeed. To do this, we need to encourage our students to be socially conscious, creative thinkers, leaders, analysts, and in short, to be compassionate human beings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have a database for staffing and the main achievement for this year is that, we now have a system of issuing employment contracts electronically. As my Ministry deals with large numbers, we are delighted that we are now in a position to alert teachers by email that their contract is available for signature through the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS). They then sign and upload the signed contract and this is automatically attached to their electronic personnel record.

We have gone a step further and can print out forms for the Ministry of Economy to update their information for salaries to be paid. Needless to say with over 6,000 contracts to be renewed before Term 1, we will not need to use 42,000 pieces of paper and save costs and our environment. Time will be saved and teachers will be able to focus better on teaching our students and promoting education.

Our commitment to improving efficiency through using technology is ongoing, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In early 2020, we will be working with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to bring our staff databases together, and share this across the Civil Service. This will contribute to improved service delivery and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was glad to hear His Excellency reinforcing the issue of learning in safety, and I quote:

“Our favourite part of our Constitution is on the Rights of Children because we are protected, cared for and empowered to become good Fijian citizens.”

We do not want students to develop an association of learning with violence, with victimisation or with being degraded.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is much that we have done in the Ministry in following the reform and the modernisation process initiated by the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General when they held this position. There is, undoubtedly, much more to do.

I would also like to appeal to colleagues in this House not to politicise education. We are dealing with our children and we want them to grow up at their pace and in peace. As our future leaders, we want to present them with information and they can make up their own minds. However, we need to present the full information to them at the appropriate time, to enable them to make informed decisions.

As you forge ahead for academic excellence, I want you to continue sharpening your values, increase the level of tolerance amongst societies and communities, embodying the efforts of the Fijian Government to ensure that there is harmonious existence and Fiji becomes a knowledge-based society. Always display good citizenship and be advocates and champions of climate change, take ownership of the nation's decision making. I am positive that the message I have shared with you today will enrich your perspectives towards interconnectivity and multicultural existence. It will make you more appreciative towards the society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are all part of one big group, the people's representatives. Times change when everyone in the team is equally invested in the overall purpose and goal. You find yourself working faster, finding mistakes more easily and innovating better. H.E. Luccock once said, and I quote, "No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it."

Teamwork is the ability to work together towards a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organisational objectives is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will, again, reiterate to all Fijians that under the great leadership, guidance and support of our Honourable Prime Minister, I am here to serve you all and I will aim to ensure that I will keep the pledge I made to you in this august House as your Assistant Minister under the Fijian Government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Joseph Nand for his contribution to the President's Address.

Honourable Members, for the purpose of compliance to the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I am allowing the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a procedural suspension.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I beg to move:

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23 be suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on this motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In the Order Paper for today, I think, we still have six speakers to respond to His Excellency's Address for the opening of Parliament and we also have under Item 7 the consideration of Bills and thus, the motion to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate, if any, on the motion.

There being no one wishing to take the floor, I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, I have nothing further to state. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Order 23 be suspended, so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining Items on today's Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members on that note, we will now suspend proceeding for refreshment in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume in half-an-hour. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.44 p.m.



The Parliament resumed at 4.16 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on the Address by His Excellency the President, and I now call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua. You have the floor, Sir.

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

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to associate myself with all the Honourable Members of this august House to thank His Excellency the President of Fiji for his address to this House, though we do not agree with the contents of the speech made from the throne.

At the outset of my speech on this motion, Sir, I wish to put two things on record for history and posterity. Firstly, I wholeheartedly endorse all the comments and points that have been made by the Honourable Members of the Opposition. Secondly, Sir, I refute and deplore the reports published in the media recently where I was quoted as praising the Government. I wish to state here and now that I stand totally opposed to the leadership of the FijiFirst Government and my support and loyalty as always is with my Party and its leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been an old trick "to confuse the people if you cannot convince them", and that is exactly what the media has been doing - put their mouth where the money is, to drum the support for this motely Government. Thank you, God, their tactic is failing to work and both the media serving their hidden agenda, and the Government are caught red-handed in such conspiracy and exposed by the social media. I will not waste my time flogging a dead horse and get on to better things beginning by saying that I bring to you, Sir, this House, and all Honourable Members and staff the warm wishes of the humble and hardworking people of Namosi, including the season's greetings for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Beginning on a pleasant note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to congratulate the Executives and players, all the volunteers and sponsors of Navua Football Association, whose sheer hard work and sacrifice has elevated our home team back to the Premier level after a lapse of six years.

Last year, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and myself had the opportunity to address and inspire Team Navua and we are glad that they not only made it to the Premier Division but lost no games in the 2019 Soccer Season and have also won the Fiji Football Association Senior National League. It speaks volumes about the capacity and positivity of our youths.

It is now an annual practice and tradition to hear the Head of State pronounce the policies and programmes as well as the legislative agenda of the Government and Parliament is given the opportunity to debate on the same. This debate is no exception.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think no one can quarrel with the fact that all policies and programmes announced by the Government have been appealing and ambitious, correspond with the mandate secured by the Government and has been hailed as good for Fiji but let us take a quick stocktake of how many of those policies and programmes have really been fully implemented and its benefits are now making a positive difference in the lives of people in this nation.

The truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that almost all the policies and programmes of this Government are half-baked, poorly implemented, hardly monitored, allowed to collapse and fail, consigned to the dustbins of history as acts of trial-and-error and often replaced by alternative policies and programmes

which are far worse than the first experience. That being so, let me ask the Government side, Sir, are they trying to pay tribute to His Excellency in this debate by keeping up their comedy of errors show? Our experience in the last five years and the continued version of the same fairy tale illustrates that this Government has become incompetent, ineffective, suffers from policy paralysis, is plagued by a lack of genuine leadership and has lost the direction.

At best, it is a rudderless ship which can either be drowned, not by the storm but rough financial weather or hit the reef of economic crisis in the making, and consign to the dustbins of history.

As the Shadow Minister for Youth and Sports, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to thank the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports for laying the agenda for youth and sports in line with what was pronounced by His Excellency the President last year. I expected some fireworks from him yesterday but I think he was too afraid that it might boomerang as I was to speak as his shadow after him.

The only statement on which I wish to take him to task about youth and sports is the performance of our national teams. While I share and to some extent agree with his sense of enthusiasm and optimism about our national team, I am a bit cautious as well which leads me to ask as to why our National Volleyball Team never participated in the last Pacific Games?

I hope the Honourable Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports who probably knows more on this than his Minister can enlighten us on that and that will reveal a lot.

The youth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not a separate element but an integral part of the State. They are affected by all the legislations, policies and programmes of the Government. In many cases, they are paying the finance to the Government directly or indirectly via taxes, fees, levies, fines, duties, tariffs, et cetera. More importantly, it is the youth who will inherit the legacy left behind by this Government and therefore the voice of the youth must matter, have a space and be allowed to prevail.

As a refresher, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me point out following three most pressing issues created by this Government by its poorly planned and implemented policy and programmes for our youths:

1. Unemployment;
2. High Public Debt; and
3. Environmental exploitation.

That, in turn, is worsened by the high cost of living, unprecedented inflation, over-regulation and over-taxing, rampant destruction and systematic loot of our flora, fauna, natural resources and pristine environment. Having being through that experience, no youth feels safe and secured in Fiji today under the leadership of the Government.

The overarching mood of the youths specifically and the nation generally is that of resignation and migration having lost their sense of belongingness and ownership. This is the lowest of patriotic citizenship since our nationhood and the blame for this squarely lies on this Government and its leadership. They have used the people as dices on the chess board and sacrificed the interests and aspirations of the people on the altar of their personal and political ambitions and the carnage of democracy since 2006 continues.

In respect of the youth, it brings me to quote British Statesman, Sir Winston Churchill, who said, and I quote: "It is easy to deceive the youth because they believe in hope." Realising that maxim in full measure, the policies and programmes floated in the manifesto of the FijiFirst Party exactly sought to rise the hopes of our youth leading them to vote for them but in turn the FijiFirst Government has not only

failed but betrayed the youth of Fiji for their goodness. Today, their words sound hollow and are mocked by the youth as an act of back-stabbing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now give a few examples of how the youth of Fiji were betrayed and deceived by the FijiFirst Party and this Government since 2014. That red list goes as follows:

1. Management and continuous reform of Tertiary Education Loans Scheme which has narrowed and compromised the scope and concept of 'Education for all.' That is denying the right to our youth and all those who seek higher education;
2. Discriminatory practices against the interests and aspirations of the youth and those who seek higher education by the Toppers Scheme creating an elite educational class in the country who are likely to flee and add value to other economies other than our own given the working conditions, pay scale and high cost of living;
3. Un-fulfilled promise of "one laptop per child" which was firstly reduced to one smartphone per child and then further depleted to one electronic gadget per child. Not a single student in Fiji has received that which demonstrates the point as to how the youth and students of this country were hoodwinked by the FijiFirst Government;
4. Uncertain and unaccounted issuance of tools, farm implements and allocation of leases or lands, plant machinery, fittings and equipment to those youth graduating from the Fiji College of Agriculture, Navuso Agricultural School and those trained and inducted under the National Youth Training Scheme that has deterred many capable youths from joining and benefitting from such initiatives because at the end of the day, it all boils down to whether there is enough funding to cater for them to establish and start a new life;
5. Gross failure to develop sporting facilities around the two major islands and in the rural and maritime areas as pledged by the FijiFirst Party in its Elections manifesto of 2014. Instead the Government has wasted millions of dollars on the Natadola Golf extravaganza and Super Rugby matches which have only created jobs befitting "King for a day" and beggar for the rest of the time for the locals;
6. Danger of our youth and students being involved in school fundraising from next year wasting their study and leisure time because having failed to deliver tuition free education and due to its own financial constraints, the FijiFirst Government has now reduced grants to schools. What a mockery of the concept of free education!

Conundrums within the Ministry of Youth and Sports where Youth Officers were laid off their jobs and their positions were re-advertised with another name but the same job descriptions and reduced salaries. This is another example of the FijiFirst Government running deep into financial crisis and compromising and punishing our youth for its populist policies gone wrong.

(Hon. P.K. Bala interjects)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, how can anyone for a moment or any youth in his or her right frame of mind trust this Government again that what it has got pronounced His Excellency the President from the throne as its youth and sports policies and programmes will ever be allowed to see the light of the day? They are doomed to decorate the paper on which it is written and then concealed away from public domain by the tacit deployment of politics of diversion which has been a staple trait and hallmark of the FijiFirst Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to plead with the Government and I think the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services who was the Chief Guest at the last Namosi Provincial Council meeting will agree and support me on this one, it is the need to facilitate the Tikina Council meetings and implement the resolutions taken therein.

Before summing up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to thank the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts for securing more than \$2.1 million worth of sponsorship for the first phase of work from the Government and the people of the United Arab Emirates for the development of Ratu Simione Matanitobua College at Lobau in Namosi which I had, the honour to launch last month in the memory of my beloved father who was a career school teacher.

The project involves three phases and we are expecting to see a fruitful conclusion of the same. The first phase is expected to be implemented within a few months' time as it is now under progress which is a fitting tribute to my beloved father and the people of Namosi.

Before I conclude Sir, I wish to speak on a few of the related issues to His Excellency the President's Address and the Government policies and programmes. Firstly, it is more than apparent now that this Government is masquerading with the mandate of the people lining the pockets of the elite class and enriching itself and those who speak and share similar irrational and radical ideas which are totally unacceptable and lethally dangerous for a place like Fiji. The exposure of the Grace Road Church debacle last weekend is just a tip of the iceberg.

Secondly, there has been a lot of talk about the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in which respect Fiji is lagging behind as established at the Inter-Parliamentary Union Meeting in Mongolia this year. Instead of making a big hue and cry about the past, and so drama supplemented by the usual but now out of tune song and dance. I believe, at best, some of the sentiments shed in His Excellency's Address provides us with some scope to discuss and plan about the implementation of the SDGs in our own local context adapting and harmonizing the changes that will be effected in the process. Sadly, not a single Honourable Member from that side of the House has spoken on this theme which displays their lip-service to the implementation of the SDGs.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly endorse and support the address of response made by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. This Government has lost faith and trust of our people and is masquerading with the mandate of the very voters who have elected them into office.

They have failed to live up to their promises to create a Fiji where everyone is treated equally and denied us equal opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has instead robbed us of opportunities and a better future. They have divided our people, assisted in the loot of our national resources, destruction of our environment and made a mockery of the institution and structures of peace, justice, democracy and good governance.

Under their leadership and governance, Fiji has become a laughing stock in the world today and mocked by our own people in Fiji and overseas. The reception the Honourable Prime Minister recently got as a taste of his own medicine in Australia meted out by the hands of our former Fiji citizens is a living testimony of these statements of fact.

The Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports made a plea to us yesterday to stop calling for the resignation of his Government and wait until 2022. I would beg to disagree and say by 2022 you would be done as a nation as both our moral and financial bankruptcy is imminent.

I join the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and all the Honourable Members on this side of the House to call upon the Government to resign and call new elections.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I would like to correct the Minister for Forestry that I was not part of those protestors during the Honourable Prime Minister's visit to Sydney to celebrate Fiji Day. I met the Honourable Prime Minister at the airport and I told him, "I am going to visit my people of Namosi who are living in Sydney." I was not at Liverpool at that time. I was at Ashfield.

Honourable Speaker, I would like the Honourable Minister for Forests to get his information right.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Honourable Speaker, I would like to ask the Honourable Minister for Forests to get his information right. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot support the motion before the House.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua for his contribution to the debate.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament, a very good afternoon, *ni sa bula, namaste* and *asalaam alaykum*. I rise humbly to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address on 12th November in formally opening the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere and profound appreciation to His Excellency for the very stimulating and thought-provoking Address in outlining the great times of Fiji as a nation that has become a place all Fijians can call home with equal pride and acceptance. It was indeed intriguing to hear His Excellency share the experiences and sentiments of our people which has shed light on the zeal, passion and emotions of Fijians in embracing the sense of belonging and recognition bestowed unto them by the 2013 Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the biggest injustice that can be done to citizens of a country is leaving them to feel like they have an identity crisis, and the most basic kind by not having a proper national identity and this has been the bitter reality of Fiji for the longest time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, equal treatment begins with equal identity and for far too long this was not realized. I am proud as a Fijian today, that this is not so anymore. Our beloved Fiji is the epitome of the way the world should be.

Multiracialism, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are valuable elements of making Fiji just that and I pity every individual out there who has not learnt this till today and claim that common identity is a mistake, is wrong, is unfair and should not be a Constitutional Right. I pity them deeply, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Nawaikula, *samaj samaj ke samajhna bhi samajh haye*. No, you will never understand that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I pity them because they are blinded to how a common identity has brought about greater national pride. They cannot see how a common identity is the basis of equal treatment at all levels. And they completely fail to accept that the Fiji today is a result of every Fijian sharing a common national identity regardless of where they came from and which ethnic group they belong to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was genuinely very glad to hear His Excellency take names of Fijians of various ethnicities in this august House to express the impact of the Bill of Rights establishment under the 2013 Constitution. It was such a humbling reminder that the people being talked about were all people of this one great nation, Fiji, who have the same rights despite the many things that make them different. Again, Honourable Nawaikula, you will never understand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I unreservedly endorse His Excellency's message of embodying quality leadership which will lay a concrete foundation towards a fair, just, equal and inclusive political arena for our future. I sincerely thank His Excellency the President of our beloved republic for such an outstanding leadership and service to the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to sincerely thank our Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General for their guidance, support and direction that has assisted many of us over the period that we have served as Government leaders under the FijiFirst banner aiming to make Fiji the best in its being.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has consistently shared the plight expressed by His Excellency through promoting inclusivity, empowering women, providing equal opportunities to all and through various Government incentives that provide validity to the vulnerable Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I salute His Excellency's focus on inclusivity, security and stability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me remind this august House that today, 19th November, marks the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (PCAN), an important agenda for the Ministry since 2002.

This year, the National Coordinating Committee for Children (NCCC) will be launching a coalition between all partners of child protection in Government, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and development partners with relevant events and activities to focus on and increase prevention education.

The theme for this year is, "Healthy homes help children grow". The theme focuses on the importance of having a child-friendly environment, as this will positively impact a child's development.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, tomorrow is World Children's Day, marking the anniversary of the dates when the UN General Assembly adopted both, the Declaration and the Convention of Children's Rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as some of us know, sets out a number of children's rights such as the right to be protected from violence and discrimination and the right to life, health and education.

The goal of World Children's Day is to improve child welfare worldwide, promote and celebrate children's rights and promote togetherness and awareness amongst all children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Children's Day and World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect 2019 embodies the notion of togetherness. This year, we would like to encourage parents, communities, schools, faith-based leaders and the general public to work together for our children by guiding them, listening to them and caring for them in order to help them become the best versions of themselves.

Children are the leaders of tomorrow. Our future leaders deserve to be loved, trusted, cared for, protected and respected. Hence, we encourage parents, families, communities, schools, faith-based leaders and leaders of the nation to work together in creating a child-friendly and healthy environment for our children. My humble request and my humble prayers to everyone, especially to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua who is not here today, please do not curse the children.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- She had already cursed the descendants, the members, please those children do not deserve your curses, they deserve your love and affinity. .

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry with its stakeholders, continue to work tirelessly in ensuring that the rights of the Fijian children are upheld without any compromise, and the progress that we have made are quite evident in our legislative reforms, policies and programmes, addressing the needs of our children.

The Fijian Government has remained committed at so many levels to better the future of our children, moving away from the regressive state that was there for children in the past. Even His Excellency mentioned so, and I quote:

“In past decades, Fijian children were denied the priceless assurance of security, who were constantly told they were different from one another, and who never knew the optimism that equal opportunity engenders.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot deny the fact that there were times of lost hopes, uncertainty, fear, rejection, prejudice and division, but the noble vision and the continuous efforts of our Honourable Prime Minister and the FijiFirst Government has brought about stability, hope, security and inclusivity. Now, is the time to boast about our stability and the sphere of security that drives our Fijian dreams.

Martin Luther, King Jr. once said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I quote:

“Darkness cannot drive out hate; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

The FijiFirst Government has been the light and love that our country needed to come out of the darkness that encircled our earlier generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister's vision and conviction in ensuring Fiji is one, has been reflected in our Government's effort to tirelessly ensure that we build an unprejudiced society for all. He has always promoted equal citizenry for all and provided a fair platform for growth based on merit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have witnessed remarkable achievements under his dynamic leadership and a record of 10 years of consecutive economic growth has brought unprecedented prosperity to our people, lowered unemployment and opened up new opportunities for our young people.

Our digital government transformation has put Government services at the fingertips of Fijians in every corner of the country, streamlining how we can serve our people better and give them the tools and resources they need to thrive - e-transport, BDM services, payment via phone, Walesi free-to-air television, e-passport and the new bizzFiji portal, are just a few examples.

Again, the roots of these evolutionary national incentives lie in our 2013 Constitution and as emphasised by His Excellency the President that, "in only six short years of his existence, our Constitution has stamped its place in the hearts of our people, especially our young people".

The enthusiasm in our young people ratifies our Constitution and instils understanding and mutual respect that harbors the aspiration to building a better nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been highly inspired by His Excellency's vision for a future Fiji. He emphasised the values of unity and stability, and praised our youth's optimism towards the new Fiji.

His Excellency's actions must be applauded foremost as such engagement with the highest office in the land will surely instil confidence and a sense of pride and re-assurance in the minds of our young people. As a result, many will want to mould their future development in the exemplary manner in which His Excellency has and continues to conduct himself.

Our Government aims to empower our young people to think outside the box and make Fiji the hub of innovation for the Pacific and the world. Mr. Speaker Sir, this is the time that young people should realise that the world is full of entrepreneurial opportunities. Programmes like Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES), the creation of vocational centres and establishment of Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board (TSLB) were intended to promote and harness the talents of young Fijians. It is the Government's support to young Fijians to develop or expand their innovative and unique ideas which can help cultivate new opportunities and scopes of national growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year marks 49 years of our Independence. Next year, we will be celebrating 50 years and what better time than now to reflect on how blessed we are with beautiful surroundings, fertile islands and oceans of life. I urge every member of the nation to pledge to the responsibility of looking after our environment as we face the ills of climate change.

Let us join our climate change champion, our Honourable Prime Minister, who says that even the youngest Fijian can play their part by properly disposing rubbish and eliminating the use of single use plastic bags.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my capacity as the Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, I am happy to say that our Ministry, under the sterling leadership of the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, is taking new and greater strides in the area of inclusive development.



It is our privilege at the Ministry to administer the primary programmes and policies for Fijians living with disabilities, and at the same time we are thankful to the line Ministries in having programmes specially aimed at benefitting this segment of our population as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as per the most recent census data, 13.7 percent of our population are living with, at least, one functioning challenge. We have the responsibility and obligation to ensure the best interest of these Fijians with disabilities is protected in every aspect of life.

Our greatest commitment to our fellow Fijians living with disabilities was shown through our 2013 Constitution. Section 42 of the 2013 Constitution is the first rights-based law that we have ever had in Fiji for persons living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2017. Following the ratification of the Convention, this Parliament enacted a domestic law in the form of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, which further clarifies and mandates legal obligations pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities in Fiji.

With these legal platforms in place, one can strongly assert that Fijians living with disabilities and the issues they face in their daily lives, have never been so visible and never have we had a Government that inculcates this visibility in policies and programmes like we do now Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now wish to highlight a number of initiatives funded by Government which have made persons living with disabilities more visible and empowered them in a way they have never been empowered before. These are:

- Disability Allowance Programme for which the Ministry has been allocated its own budget and currently assists over 5,000 recipients.
- Insurance cover for injury, fire, life and funeral.
- Training for Caregivers.
- Grants Organisations which provides services to persons living with disabilities.
- Budgetary allocation to the FNCDP.
- Bus Fare Subsidy Programme benefiting 77,757 persons.
- A 300 percent tax incentive for employers who employ persons living with disabilities.
- Full time scholarships similar to the Toppers package for students with disabilities.
- Prioritising areas, like Speech Therapists, Educational and Clinical Psychologists and Occupational Therapists in the award of Toppers Scholarships.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I wish to render my deepest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of the Executive Director of the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, Dr. Sitiveni Suka Bose Yanuyanutawa, who passed away on Tuesday, 5th November, 2019. He became a powerful advocate for people with disabilities, spending his life working to change perceptions and to develop disability policies in Fiji. To pay our honest respect to the late Dr. Sitiveni, we shall continue our efforts and dedication towards serving our people with compassion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Hear, hear!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government has proven that it prioritises the most vulnerable Fijians and I very humbly pledge to continue to serve my Fiji, my Government, my Prime Minister and my fellow Fijians with diligence, honesty, empathy, love and compassion, to resonate with the call of His Excellency for the future of this beloved land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, since yesterday, I have been hearing the word, 'resign', like a broken record re-tracking from the other side of the House. These calls for resignation have all come from the new Members of the Parliament; Honourable Rabuka, Honourable Qionibaravi, Honourable Kuridrani and Honourable Tabuya.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Prime Minister is a people's Prime Minister with the focus of making the lives of ordinary Fijians better than ever. He is a visionary leader, who has passion in his heart and character in his work. I challenge any Opposition Member to walk out of this building and ask a common man who is going home to his family, not someone who is manipulated by the other side, please, a common man...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- ... about our leader and they will tell you better than any of us politicians about the impact that this man and his Government had made on their families.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- We do not have to look far, just look across the street, you will see the Grand Pacific Hotel. Look across Parliament, you will see Albert Park. Look to the sky, you will see Fiji Airways. Our banner is flying higher than ever before.

(Honourable Government Members inject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Then the question is; why should our Honourable Prime Minister and his Government resign? Resign for what? Resign so that we go back decades into the darkest times of history which breeds racism, nepotism, division, corruption and national failures? No way!

I think every Fijian should feel blessed to be living under the leadership of my Honourable Prime Minister. A lot has been achieved and a lot has yet to be done. Let us all celebrate the successes and continue our efforts towards nation building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish every Fijian and everyone a very Merry Christmas, a blessed and a prosperous New Year. God bless Fiji and Fijians, thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I thank and commend His Excellency the President for his Address to the nation in Opening the Parliament Session for 2019 to 2020 on 12th November, 2019. I must also thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, for the trip to Tahiti. We enjoyed our tour, it is a beautiful country, everything is beautiful and we ask Honourable George about everything else.

(Laughter)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- However, His Excellency's Address, just mounts praises for the FijiFirst Party's claimed achievements or progresses over the last decade of 13 years. There is no problem about that, but without admitting many weaknesses in leadership or management or otherwise. I will just concentrate on leadership to see the type and quality we do have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge the developments that had been made over the years in many areas, such as schools, hospitals, roads, infrastructure, water, electricity, et cetera. I must thank the Government for that, but that is part of the Government to do, to carry on with the developments from where the previous Government has left off. And that is part and parcel of the work of the current Government, to actually continue with whatever development that is required or needed. Most of those developments cannot escape our attention and I acknowledge the Government for that.

At the same time, I would like to acknowledge the developments in my own area in Wainunu, particularly the Vodafone mast built there. Now, we are able to communicate with the three other villages, many new settlements and farming areas in the Wainunu area.

I must also acknowledge the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) that had improved the road from Cogeia in Wainunu, to Navakasali (my village) to Namuavoivoi and right up to Labasa. Buses are running there everyday and we thank the Honourable Prime Minister personally, for speaking to Parmod and FRA on improving that, and we hope that more improvements will be done to the bridges along that road from Cogeia in Wainunu to Namuavoivoi. That trip has been one of the most popular now because it has always been full from Nasolo, Nasavu, Nadi District to Wainunu. It is an express now where it arrives in Labasa at 8.30 a.m. or 9.00 a.m. They do their shopping until 3.30 p.m., then they are back home at 6.00 p.m. or 7.00 p.m. So I must congratulate the developments in the Wainunu area, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

As His Excellency the President had stated, and I quote:

“As the journeys of many of the world's greatest democracies and economically powerful nations have taught us, the quality of our leadership in these formative years will be defining for our political system.”

I will just focus on the quality of our leadership. As if FijiFirst Party Government is the best highest quality of leadership for political system in Fiji - no, I totally disagree with that. I now wish to explain why?

The Bainimarama and FijiFirst Party Government has taken us away from:

- Democracy to dictatorial regime;
- Ensuring responsibility citizens to legalistic rights throughout the schools, family, et cetera. There are many repercussions for those kind of things, we push it too fast;
- Freedom to suppression; and
- Shifting leadership from Godly-directed governance to secularism - from God, *Jesus*, the Holy Spirit to evil, humanly, worldly interaction, as a foundation that we need to look at, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I would like to dwell on the last one for the time being, particularly when we talk about Fiji as a secular State as where our leadership has taken us to. This is where the FijiFirst Party Government leadership has taken Fiji away from God to evil worldly secularism. Fiji should be just a State, not secular State, by doing so, we are opening ourselves to numerous evil values, principles and influences. It is disastrous for Fiji as whole. There is a spiritual doom, someone mentioned yesterday.

Government or governance is God-created, therefore, a separation of Church and State is God-driven where roles of civil leadership and priesthood were best separated. When God Himself appointed the rulers and structured the leadership of the first nation, he founded to accomplish His planned salvation, He carefully divided the office of King (State) and the Office of the Priest (Church). Theocracy under man is inappropriate.

The Old Testament separation continues to the New Testament, by the time of *Jesus* or *Yeshua*, by the Roman State leadership as the King or as the Government and the Church leadership with similar principle or application throughout till today. Not only the operation of church and State rooted in the *Bible*, its origin cannot be traced nowhere else in history or literature. It is a uniquely biblical concept keeping in mind the biblical truth that God has established all authorities, including the Church, the State and we can depict the biblical view of biblical simply as God Jehovah as Head and both Church and State are responsible and accountable to Him, as Creator, both Church and State. Whether that State is headed by a Christian or a man of God or not, one is to fear and obey the Lord in his character and leadership.

Secular view, however, is that there is no God, or the State has become God, which the leadership of the FijiFirst Government has and is taking us into. Fiji must come away from a secular worldly governance concept.

The theocratic view of governance is for God to Head and Lead both the Church and the State as well. This form of governance was true, perfect relationship with God (as Creator) and man as follower, (His creature at the beginning), until Adam and Eve, our ancestors were seen by disobeying God who wanted to be God. That same secular concept, Mr. Speaker, Sir, view or principle wanting to be God is now in place and alike in Fiji's 2013 Constitution - the secular State foundation.

That theocratic view of governance where God to head and lead both the Church and State will come again, when *Christ Yeshua* returns the second time. *Christ Yeshua* is now near and we need to be ready for that. Theocracy under man is inappropriate, dangerous, it will not work. There are many bad examples.

In biblical view of governance of which Fiji as well as all nations or States in the world was founded by God-fearing forefathers. In Fiji in 1835 when the word of God arrived in Fiji, God ought to be the head and both Church and State (no need to be separated) are both to be responsible and accountable to God as Creator. What we are seeing is going away from God but is a world of evil.

There are two clear separate roles, each hold or each is entrusted to each which is the biblical division of labour between Church and State. The Church is tasked with matters of the souls and the State is tasked with matters of civil conduct. The Church's prime directive is to lead men to peace with God, the State's prime directive is to keep the peace among fallen men. The Church's authority extends only to members of the church, the State has responsibility for all citizens.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, simply stated, the role of the Church is evangelism for voluntary conversion of individuals to Christ, to accept Christ as one's Saviour from sin and eternal death and for everlasting life.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the State's role is to apply force, and that force is law and arms for all men or citizens to obey in an orderly and moral manner.

All laws must be biblically-based and use of arms is for security purposes only for the protection of all citizens. How can a sinful man protect himself from other sinful men? One cannot protect himself from his own sinfulness, there must be a law and arms for government to ensure order, peace and prosperity and to assist individuals to see and accept Christ as Saviour as well.

This, unfortunately, is not the case in Fiji. Laws, policies, decisions are outside the ambit of God's creation and intention in principles and values and have become too secularised, become evil and satanic for self-interests. An example, Parliament's Privilege Committee's recommendation as a conditional apology - that is not genuine apology nor genuine confession. It is not honest, it is not biblical, it is not right, it is immoral.

One law for FijiFirst and one law for others and arms had not been used wisely for the protection of the citizens of Fiji but to murder, kill, injure, threaten, torture our own citizens, shame! Laws and use of arms or governance of Fiji need to be based and built upon God's word, biblical values and principles.

This is where quality leadership should be leading us to, not to evil and worldly but nearer to Christ as our Saviour, to peace, blessings, prosperity and everlasting life.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, Sir, to enlarge our foreign relations, I recommend that we analyse our Foreign Relations and recommend that Fiji should have an embassy in Israel to bless Israel and that we also have more blessings. If we already have, then we strengthen our relationship, particularly in agriculture, where we can learn more from the Israelis in the days ahead.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the President also mentioned that we are only one, but I must say that we are not equal. We are created differently, but we can treat others as equal, as one. Treatment and opportunities, yes, we are not equal. We are created differently but we can treat and give opportunities equally to each other, so it is important that we do accordingly.

Also someone has also mentioned yesterday that we are all children of God. Let me say that we are not all children of God. We are all creation of God. God loves us all, we are not all children of God. Let me tell you, we are not all children of God.

John 1:12 - "Yet to all who receive him, Jesus Christ/Yeshua, to those who believe in His Name; Yeshua/Christ Jesus, He gave the right to become children of God." Only when you confess your sins to Jesus, then you can become a child of God. In verse 13 "children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God." See, we are all creation of God, in Genesis 1:26, we are created in His Image and His Likeness. We are all created differently but God loves us all.

In John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son; Jesus Christ and I am offering you Jesus Christ, now, here again, but the right is yours, the freedom to choose is yours, I respect.

On education, Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is important to convince our leadership and parents to place more emphasis on parents on the education of our children in schools and protect their rights. There are a lot of weaknesses affecting the family and schools, some drug-related problems are experienced in schools, children are not listening to teachers, et cetera. It is important to place more emphasis on leadership to be responsible rather than just enforcing legalistic rights in the schools. Children now have to show respect for teachers or authority as they exercise their rights.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the President mentioned that serving our landowners with real opportunities to put their land to productive use and take up larger roles in our national development. But, they have reduced the budget from \$10 million to \$2 million. What has been achieved?

In the pine industry, how many landowner contractors are there? How many are in management level? How many shares in Fiji Pine Limited or Fiji Pine Group? When will the industry return to the resource owners? Those are the questions the landowners are still asking? It is important.

Native forest, the Fiji Forest Industry was bought by Fiji Pine Limited (now Fiji Pine Group), now they are selling it out. What about the concessions? I think there is a need to return all the concession in Vanua Levu to the respective *mataqali* and respective landowners.

Also on mahogany, Honourable Speaker, Sir, when will the guaranteed debt be paid off? When will the timber sales proceeds be paid to the landowners? The sooner that is paid, the better. Also, a humble request if they can review the log prices that is going at the moment in order to have more purchases of logs as we go along in the industry. Also it is important to have a certification of products whether it is pine, native timber or mahogany. It is important to have a certification of our products and I hope that the Ministry will look at the process of having our products certified and having an easier market in overseas.

On the same note, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I also request the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to look at organic law. In Tahiti, they have the Tahiti organic law, why do we not have it here in Fiji? I think it is important to have organic law here in Fiji. If the Honourable Minister for Agriculture cannot do it then I can do it as a private bill but it is important to have organic farms to protect our environment. We need certified products with regards to our agricultural products, particularly with organic products. It is important to look at that, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

History of leadership by the Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama and the FijiFirst Party Government had all along shown poor or questionable leadership. It began in the Military Forces under Honourable Bainimarama's leadership as Commander. Supporters who supported the coup in 2000, divided the Military and that led to a mutiny, supported independent candidates in the 2006 General Elections with financial support of a couple of tourist developers, owners, one is no more now, carried out the 2006 coup as Commander of Fiji Military Forces, abrogated the 1997 Constitution but still is the people's choice ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Point of Order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Honourable Speaker, I just heard the Honourable Mitieli said that I supported the coup in 2000. I want a clarification on that. If he cannot make a clarification on that then I want him to withdraw that statement.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulanauca, you have heard what the Prime Minister has said.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, Sir. I have heard what he has said. He was the Commander. I am sure that he knows what was going on in there - Military vehicles, Military personnel were there, if he knows then he supported it.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- He needs to withdraw that.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- What to withdraw?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have heard what the Prime Minister has said.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- He was there as the Commander. He knows what was going on as the Commander.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I did not support the coup, that is what I said.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- I withdraw, coming from him.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Good.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.-

- Violence under the Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama's leadership against women, girls at the camp and streets and elsewhere;
- Formulated without consultation installed draconian Decrees of 2010 and 2011 and entrenched it in 2013;
- Constitution against the resource owners;
- Constitution of 2013, a forced Constitution and burned the people's version;
- General Elections of 2014 and 2018 were rigged elections;
- Debt increasing - unchecked, shame;
- Unemployment increasing - more leaving the country;
- Crime increasing - more violent now;
- Poverty increasing - shame.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Recently, violence against a Member of Parliament - shame! That is a record of leadership.

First, the FijiFirst originates through a coup of self-interests.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Self-interest, we are talking about self-interest by the Prime Minister himself, Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama the then Commander and supported by the Fiji Military Forces. It is a shame for the leader of the Fiji Military Forces (because soldiers merely obey commands) saw it fit to use its own security forces institution to protect the personal interest of its Commander - almost arrested for various allegations including murder. So, it is misleading to try to claim that Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama and FijiFirst Party leadership came about through a democratic process and it is quality leadership. It came through a *coup* and an unfair, corrupt rigged process of elections.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- The involvement of the Fiji Military Forces has tarnished the reputable name of "Fiji Military Forces" by ousting SDL, a people's elected Government and has lowered it to that of evil-corrupt leadership, indiscipline, weak, surrendering to certain Arab Muslim forces in Golan Heights. Shame!

The Fiji Military Forces is no longer popular nor acceptable to the general public, no longer a friend but a foe. Evidence to such is increase in disorderliness to authority with violence against women, girls and now violence against authority such as Police which is sad to say the least. These are results of taking the law into your own hands and giving them unchecked rights to do as they wish.

Honourable Speaker Sir, secondly against the law when Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama abrogated 1997 Constitution, the People's Constitution after the Supreme Court declared the 2006 *coup* by him was illegal. That is shame.

Again the President is favouring the 2013 Constitution which is not a People's Constitution, but a forced Constitution. The Constitution itself is a lie as it claims to be a People's Constitution. Shame on the FijiFirst Government.

Claims that the 2013 Constitution has given the young freedom, health, employment and right is again misleading. As a so-called Fijian, they do not know or properly understand the Fijian language, culture, tradition, et cetera.

Just concluding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what right of information and transparency is His Excellency the President talking about? When public information is not made available through various institutions such as financial, lease particulars or details, export figures, *iTaukei* ethnic assistance, facts and figures, et cetera. Officials in Government institutions refuse and/or are reluctant to give public information for fear of reprisal, termination or severe punishment for informing the public.

HON .SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- This is ridiculous, Mr .Speaker, Sir, but it is how the FijiFirst Government, a dictatorial Government is ruling the nation. What kind of leadership is that? Very poor. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of the House and ladies and gentlemen.

I rise to contribute to the debate relating to His Excellency's Address on the Opening of Parliament last week.

Honourable Speaker, before I start, I just want to touch a bit on what the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca had shared with us today in relation to Israel. Over the last few days, there was a resolution in the United Nations to condemn Israel for some land issues and Fiji voted against Israel with the multitude of nations. Only eight nations voted with Israel. At a time when missiles were raiding over Israel, when the Israelites were hiding in the bunkers, Fiji should have stood with Israel. The vast majority of our people would have loved to see that.

Honourable Speaker, His Excellency the President has delivered an Address designed to set the stage for the year in a manner but unfortunately that fell short of expectations. We know it is the fault of the Government of the day, FijiFirst, that a very poor speech was given to His Excellency, whom we know is a favourite son of Fiji and deserves much, much, better.

Be that as it may, His Excellency has asked us three questions which can be summarised in one sentence, be honest with yourself and speak the truth. In one of the lines His Excellency has highlighted there are still elements who choose to undermine our prosperity. I ask the question, Honourable Speaker, what prosperity?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- 10 years of straight growth.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, let me share with the House the GDP per capita for Oceania.

1. Australia, the GDP per capita is US\$43,000; Australia has a GDP of \$1.32 trillion;
2. New Zealand - US\$30,400;



3. Palau - US\$10,500;
4. Marshall Islands - US\$8,700;
5. Tonga - US\$8,200;
6. Micronesia - US\$7,300;
7. Kiribati US\$6,400;
8. Samoa US\$6,200;
9. Nauru US\$5,000;
10. Fiji US\$4,900.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Shame!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I am going back to 2017/2018, Honourable Speaker. The source, Honourable Speaker is Aneki.com, an independent privately owned website in Toronto, Canada. They are dedicated to providing wider knowledge of the world's countries and regions using sources from the UN and the American CIA.

Honourable Speaker, GDP per capita is a universal measure globally for the prosperity of nations. It is the best measurement of a country's standard of living. It tells how prosperous a country feels to each of its citizens. Honourable Speaker, all the islands from Palau to Nauru do not have what Fiji has.

They do not have cities like Suva and Lautoka or the major townships such as Nadi, Labasa, Ba et cetera. They do not have an airport like Nadi, they do not have ports like Suva and Lautoka. They do not have our hotels and resorts. They do not have an airline with modern jets, they do not have the likes of Monasavu, Nadarivatu Hydro Schemes or Vaturu Dam. They do not have our industries, they do not have our road network, they do not have our universities. We have much much more but on a per capita basis, we have less money in our pockets.

Honourable Speaker, as we speak today, our Fijian women are being hired in Tonga for domestic duties. We are less prosperous. Why? It is because Honourable Speaker, a significant sector of our population is not engaged productively in the economy of the country. Who are these? They are the *iTaukei*, the indigenous people or the natives, once known exclusively as the Fijians. They make up 60 percent of the population but control less than 20 percent of the capital and in the process make up the majority of the poor in Fiji. I have often referred to their poverty as the "elephant in the room". It looms large and no one can miss it, but we cannot ignore it. It is awkward talking about it, it is deemed racist when we talk about it but it does not diminish in size, it is unmoving and something has to be done about it.

Leadership in the past have not been blind to the poverty of the *iTaukei*. All sorts of programmes were set up to help them, borrowing from practices in other countries and while all of the results were mixed, progress was being made.

Honourable Speaker, it is generational and you do not take your foot off the pedal, you press on. His Excellency talks about shielding and empowering those who are vulnerable, but, sadly for 13 years the FijiFirst and Bainimarama have done exactly the opposite for the most economically vulnerable people, the *iTaukei*. The Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had his affirmative actions, the Prime Minister Rabuka had his 9-point plan and the Prime Minister Qarase had his 50/50 vision by 2020 all designed....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the Honourable Member is misleading Parliament because I have just got the figures with the current GDP and the International Monetary Fund figures quote the GDP per capita that there is:

1. Australia;
2. New Zealand;
3. Nauru; and then
4. Fiji.

So I do not know where the Honourable Member got his figures from. This is from the International Monetary Fund 2018 figures list of Oceania countries by GDP per capita.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So the Honourable Member has actually misled Parliament by saying Fiji is number eight or number seven, or whatever he is talking about.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, this is from a credible website, there are people who rate countries prosperity.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- IMF.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We are going according to this, Honourable Speaker, and he is doing the rounds today.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Fake news.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- As I said, Honourable Speaker, our women are serving as house maids in Tonga.

HON. MEMBER.- In the Cook Islands too.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So let us not play around with figures....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You do have your figures, we have our figures.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- They can have their figures, we have our figures, but, the reality is what people....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, instead of continuing.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- All fake news.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Incidentally, Honourable Speaker, I have seen all that but this is more relevant to us.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That is the reality of life in Fiji, Honourable Speaker. We are not prosperous.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- More fake news.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Instead of continuing the efforts of the past PM to elevate the *iTaukei* and create parity in the share of wealth or remove the elephant from the room, Prime Minister, Honourable Bainimarama has done very little.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Put very simply, no people in modern times has been neglected economically as the natives of Fiji. The *iTaukei* have become listless and left adrift with little money coming their way. We are polarised as ever, we have low GDP per capita relative to our neighbourhood and we are on the verge of economic collapse.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Fake news.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The revised forecast of 1 percent, Honourable Speaker, is already in negative territory. Yes, we have had years of consecutive economic growth, but, growing the economy on consumption and public spending is nothing to write home about, Honourable Speaker. Anyone can spend money like a drunken sailor as we have witnessed in this country. The enthusiasm of FijiFirst is waning and people have realised that it is disastrous neglecting the *iTaukei*. This was clearly evident Honourable Speaker, from the 2018 Election Office results. This is from the Fiji Elections Office, some 637, 537 voters were registered to vote, 35.6 percent voted for FijiFirst, 35.6 voted for the Opposition and 28.8 percent abstained or did not vote.

There was only a difference of 147 between the FijiFirst and the Opposition. Honourable Speaker, the writing is on the wall that the policies of FijiFirst is no longer acceptable to the people of Fiji. And as I have said this morning, once the Opposition decides to coalesce, FijiFirst is toast. You have not got a

hope as a political Party, you have not got a hope. You might as well go home, Honourable Speaker. There is no way they can continue winning the elections.

Honourable Speaker, the aspirations of the *iTaukei* is legitimate and in keeping with the charter of the United Nations for indigenous people. We have often spoken about of ILO 169 and UNDRIP provisions for the indigenous people which Fiji should embrace. But FijiFirst comes up with all sorts of irrational excuses why we cannot.

It is evident that people are rejecting the FijiFirst politics of fear; that for modern minds, demonising the legitimate aspirations of the *iTaukei* is ridiculous and serves no purpose.

Honourable Speaker, FijiFirst shamelessly played on this fear during the last Elections. I was shocked to learn that the Hindustani Radio Station kept running whole day with the line by FijiFirst that a vote for Biman Prasad is a vote for Sitiveni Rabuka. That is the kind of politics of fear.

Honourable Speaker, to most Fijians, 1987 and 2000 were million years ago; it is gone, it is done. People have changed. They see wisdom and benefits in embracing the economic aspirations of the *iTaukei* and weave them into the economic development plans of the country.

The *iTaukei* are numerous, making up the vast majority of the population. They own the resources and uplifting them will grow Fiji's economy to heights well beyond our imagination. Uplifting the *iTaukei* will be like the rising tide that lifts all boats.

Mauritius has a GDP of US\$14.22 billion. That is the type of figure that comes to mind with all cylinders firing. The Mauritius economy, Honourable Speaker, saw dramatic increases from 2003 to 2018.

The Fiji economy was well into recovery mode under the SDL Government in 2003. It is too bad that someone executed a *coup* in 2006. But let us explore measures we can immediately implement to improve the economic wellbeing of the *iTaukei*, as follows:

1. Increase leases of gross receipts for native land on which hotels are built. Tourism will soon be making \$2 billion, yet some of the landowners are only making 2 percent or 3 percent of gross.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Ask the previous Government, what did they do?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- And it would take another 40 to 50 years to make 5.5 percent.

Recently, Honourable Speaker, leases at Denarau were renewed at 3.5 percent, with 0.05 percent increase in every 10 years, meaning that it will get to 5.5 percent in 40 years. But if we factor in the fact that the original leases started in the 1970s, it will be close to 100 years by the time they make 5.5 percent. Naviti on the Coral Coast and Mana in Malolo are two that need urgent review.

2. Pay the *qoliqoli* owners lease for the overwater bungalows that sit on their *qoliqolis*. We hear from the Honourable Minister for Fisheries about the initiative by Marriot to protect marine life, but start by paying lease for the overwater bungalows at Momi to the *Vanua* of Nalolo.

3. Repeal the Surfing Decree and pay the *qoliqoli* owners for the use of their *qoliqoli* for recreation. The villagers of Momi and Nabila were cruelly denied proceeds for surfing at Tavarua which since termination, Honourable Speaker, have amounted to some \$10 million. It is weird to do this to the poorest people in Fiji.
4. Introduce a surcharge to supplement the income of tourism workers, who are largely *iTaukei*, as they do in most countries in Asia. I brought the petition here, it was killed in Committee by FijiFirst.
5. Introduce a \$4 or \$5 minimum wage, which would largely benefit the *iTaukei* as they make up the majority of the low-paid workers.
6. Reinstate the retirement age in the Civil Service to 60 where the majority are *iTaukei*.
7. Grow the engineering corps in the Military and have the *iTaukei* youth develop technical skills through hands-on experience and formal classes at recognised institutions.
8. Engage the prison population, which is largely *iTaukei*, in productive activities. The cane harvesting scheme, Honourable Speaker, was welcomed by farmers. I was part of the Committee for the Bill Nos. 19 and 20, and the farmers lamented the fact that the Prison authorities made it difficult for them for a scheme that was working for both, the prisoners and the farmers. Our young people who leave prison with money in their pocket would help reduce cases of recidivism.
9. Revive the Trust set up by the pine and mahogany owners, to allow them to take on commercial activities. Many may have failed, but lessons have been learnt and we must reapply ourselves.

Honourable Speaker, I know of a banker, the owner of the Bank of Bangkok and he was known to have lent money three times to a person, who has been bankrupt three times. But as long as the person had the will, had the attitude to do it, he would bless him, he would give him money. Our landowners, I hope the Honourable Minister for Forestry would take this on, that lot of trust have been set over the years. Most now are idle or dormant, they need to be revived and encourage our people to get into commercial activities.

10. On agriculture, make the collection centres built all over Fiji, work. Many are in areas dominated by *iTaukei* but are lying dormant for lack of production aligned to demand.

Honourable Speaker, when I heard about the agricultural revolution, I visualised something that I see today with Grace Road. Only later, I realised that the agricultural revolution was Grace Road, which is tragic.

Honourable Speaker, it has come up quite a bit over the last two days, but it is significant that the lady has spoken very, very poorly about Fijians. But what is significant is this, the only politicians they meet are the FijiFirst politicians. They have not met anyone from SODELPA or from NFP, only the FijiFirst people. So for her to say that, she must be saying something about our people on the other side.

There are lots of suffering, Honourable Speaker, the list is endless, but let me ask everyone to have a read of the Nine Point Plan and the 20 Year Development Plan. At

that time they may have sounded racist but in today's time, it is necessary and I think we should all embrace it.

Honourable Speaker, I just want to end with what concerns me. Writing in the *Fiji Sun* on 26th August, 2019, Nemani Delaibatiki, under the heading, "Truth First Casualty of Dirty Politics", he said something like this, and I quote:

"Speaking to people of all races from Ba to Lautoka, Nadi and Sigatoka, I discovered a disturbing resurgence of hatred and bitterness that was prevalent in the last two General Elections."

This is the Nemani Delaibatiki, who normally writes effusively about the work of FijiFirst.

And I am afraid, Honourable Speaker, that this is true, and it is all economics. We need to address the economics of the country, especially the aspirations of the *iTaukei*, whom we believe are being neglected today.

Honourable Speaker, we have a country today that is on the verge of economic collapse. We do not see any way around it and we are asking that this Government steps down.

Honourable Speaker, let me just end by reading this. This was on 4th January, 2007 by the Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama when he said, I quote: "Most seriously, the large Government deficit, the failure of the SDL Government to cut spending, the failure to revive the sugar industry, the failure to solve the land problem, the racist and selective education policies, the rapidly deteriorating public health services, the escalating poverty, the hike in the interest rates, the lack of employment, the most inevitable devaluation of the Fiji dollar, the neglect to increase exports, mismanagement, corruption and disrespect of the rule of law and the undermining of democratic values since 2000. These were the reasons for the *coup*."

Honourable Speaker, fast forward to November 2019, his words have convicted him. This is what he said on 4th January, 2007, fast forward to today, his words have convicted him and I agree with my colleagues that he should step down. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Viliame Gavoka for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, time moves on and we will move on. I now call on the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Honourable Vijay Nath. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; *bula vinaka, Ram Ram, Aslaam Walekum* and very good evening to you all.

Last week, our President opened Parliament with some bold and challenging words of encouragement for us all. In line with his vision and with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to focus my contribution predominantly on the water sector and maritime transport sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of police officers around the country and show my remorse in the attacks against police officers, who are working to protect the citizens of our beloved nation. They are doing a great job, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

For the water sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Constitution guarantees that every Fijian has the right to clean and safe water in adequate quality and access to adequate sanitation facilities. For the past few years, the Water Authority of Fiji has been focused on improving decades of neglected infrastructure. This is one way we ensure access to clean drinking water and reliable wastewater services to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reassure this august House, that Government is committed into fulfilling the goals set in its 5 Year and 20 Year National Development Plan and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6, that is, to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Water infrastructure needs are based on the Authority's 20 Year Master Plan and the capital investment from Government. This contribution towards the improvement in infrastructure has increased significantly throughout the last five years. This shows Government's commitment to ensuring that every Fijian has access to clean and safe drinking water, and adequate sanitation system.

We will continue to work with stakeholders to bridge established traditions and find innovative approaches in which efficiency and effectiveness are celebrated. Positive challenge should be enhanced and utilised for the common benefit of all.

Here are few glimpses of what the water sector is expected to look like in the next three to five years' time.

- Excellent service, supplying quality drinking water and waste water services 24/7 at a sustainable cost.
- Expansion of coverage area for water and waste water systems and ensuring sustainability in installed systems.
- Upgrading water treatment plants and wastewater treatment plants, reservoirs and reticulation systems around Fiji. For example, the new 40 mega litres treatment plant will be constructed in Viria, Naitasiri, to meet the demand of the greater Suva and Nausori areas.
- Ensuring that every Fijian household is connected to a proper sewerage treatment system is a key priority. Government intends to have 40 percent of the population connected to the central sewerage system by 2021. Public sewerage treatment system will be built and extended to all urban centres. Viable sewerage and sanitation options will also be explored in rural areas.
- As part of our rural water schemes, expansion of water network coverage in rural areas and use of new sustainable and viable options, such as desalination plants in islands, for communities that do not have access to proper surface and groundwater sources.

These and more work will ensure that water and sanitation services to the people of Fiji are enhanced.

For building a climate resilient Fiji - water sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, every year, Fiji experiences heavy periods of rain and flash floods and at least one to two cyclones or low depressions. Also, we experience prolonged periods of droughts.

Climate Change impacts and poses significant risks on water resources, infrastructure assets, livelihoods and our ecosystems. The impacts of climate change on the water and wastewater sector can be assessed through the lenses of both the operational and strategic risks.

This is because climate change is expected to impact raw water quality and the detrimental impact of high priority areas such as dry weather overflows and discharges to inland waterways. Government is integrating climate change issues in all national policies and planning processes including the water sector thus increasing awareness and understanding of climate change-related issues at all levels in Fiji.

The Government through the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has substantial number of water and wastewater assets located in proximity to the coastline and major rivers.

In previous years, adverse weather conditions and flooding in these areas have been common occurrence especially wastewater assets such as wastewater treatment plants. This caused wastewater overflow into our local flora and fauna, posing health hazard for the surrounding communities.

Over the last decade, Fiji has been experiencing some major climatic events that have either disrupted provision of service or completely damaged water and wastewater assets. The Government has invested millions of dollars to ensure permanent solutions to address these issues.

Fiji's Strategic Direction for the next three to five years in the water sector will focus on implementing projects as per the Government's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan and the WAF's master plan to achieve the established goals and indicators by 2021.

These initiatives will focus on the improvement in our operational efficiency and service delivery, increasing accessibility to water and wastewater services for all Fijians in a sustainable manner. Approximately 78 percent of Fiji's population already has access to treated and reticulated water supply. In the urban centres, 98 percent of the population have access.

Planning for the next 10 years will ensure that our capital programmes will cater for the next generation of Fijians and beyond, while improving resource allocation and financial efficiencies. We remain fully committed to providing 100 percent access to clean and safe water with proper sanitation in the coming years.

For the maritime sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to respond to Honourable Anare Jale's submissions in relation to the Vatoa Lighthouse. Honourable Jale very well knows the outcome at this point in time but he still chose to speak in this Parliament. He should be aware that the Vatoa Lighthouse issue relating to the contractors is now before the court and no further comment can be made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although less than 20,000 square kilometres, our beautiful islands are scattered over a sea area half the size of the United States of America. The maritime and shipping sector is significant and important to the world economy and also to our national economies as 90 percent of the world trade is carried out on ships.

Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone contains our sparsely distributed islands and covers about 1.3 million square kilometres of the South Pacific Ocean. This information only emphasize how vital the maritime and shipping sector is to our nation.

Fiji's maritime laws stem from the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Conventions to which Fiji has ratified 26 out of approximately 60 IMO Conventions. The Conventions are classified into three categories and stress:

- i) Maritime Safety;
- ii) Prevention of Marine Pollution; and
- iii) Liability and Compensation, especially related to damage caused by pollution.



These three categories of Maritime Safety, Prevention of Marine Pollution and Liability and Compensation are also classifications to which Fiji's three Maritime Legislations and 34 Subsidiary Legislations are arranged.

For Maritime Accessibility, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as per Section 34 of the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, Government is mandated to provide reasonable measures within its available resources to ensure that progressive realisations to the right of every Fijian have reasonable access to transportation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, accessibility to transportation is very important to this Government and that ensures that Fijians are connected to and from destinations. Data shows that there is an increase in passenger movements by 8 percent and 11 percent in cargo movement recorded in the five major economical routes of Lautoka, Savusavu, Nabouwalu, Natovi and Suva. The Ministry is working closely with vessel operators to ensure vessel scheduling in these ports are consistent and beneficial to the travelling public.

To ensure accessibility in uneconomical routes, Government through the Shipping Franchise Scheme subsidises the servicing of the nine uneconomical routes which covers the Lau Groups, some parts of the Lomaiviti Group, Kadavu, North-East Vanua Levu, Rotuma and the Yasawas.

In ensuring the safe, efficient, reliable and affordable shipping services to these routes, Government has allocated a total of \$2.3 million to ensure that all Fijians are covered.

In 2018, the cargo movement has improved for the Franchise Scheme by 9 percent compared to the same period in 2017. Majority of the outward cargo includes hardware materials, household items, fuel, oil and food supply whereas inward cargo include seafood, traditional handicraft and copra. The franchise passenger movement improved in the past three years whereby in 2018, it had increased by 7 percent. Government, in its quest to ensure that no one is left behind, has approved additional routes in the Shipping Franchise Scheme which will come into effect in the new financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is also adamant that the quality of service is provided on board vessels operating in Fiji waters. This is evident in the contract duration of the franchise scheme which will now be increased from two to fifteen years and can be used as collateral to invest in improving shipping services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government Shipping Services (GSS), with a total fleet of twelve vessels, promote and facilitates in accordance with Government policies and priorities, the national need for sea transportation. This is through the provision of shipping and maritime navigational aids services, meeting Fiji's obligation to International Maritime Conventions and meeting the needs of the maritime community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Maritime Travellers Rights, the Government, through our Ministry is currently conducting consultations on the rights of all maritime travellers in Fiji. This is, of course, a manifesto item under the FijiFirst Government and will be a Bill of Right that will protect and serve the rights of the travelling passengers or public on board vessels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the basic rights that will be addressed includes the right of time and adequate information's, the right to comfort and quality of service, the right for compensation in cases of vessel delay or emergencies.

Decarbonising Maritime Transport: In the Energy and Transport Ministers' Meeting held in Samoa in September this year, it has been reaffirmed that climate change is the single greatest threat in the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the people of the Pacific.

Recognition of transport's pivotal role in Fiji comes with the responsibility to decarbonise the sector. Our challenge is to ensure that access for all, and provide reliable services for the trade and mobility on which our economies and wellbeing depends while removing GHG emissions. Fiji's fleet comprises small vessels of less than 15 metres used as village punts to inter-island vessels up to 5000 tons.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 3,118 ships are currently registered in Fiji. The total emissions from Fiji's domestic shipping is estimated at 174 kilotons of carbon dioxide in 2016. In re-affirming its commitment, the FijiFirst Government has endorsed the Laucala Declaration, advocating the reduced GHG emissions from national transport of 40 percent by 2030 and aiming for full decarbonisation of the national transport sectors by 2050.

For Women Empowerment in the Maritime Sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the opening Address, His Excellency alluded to the empowerment of those who are vulnerable in the society particularly women and girls. This year, the IMO celebrated the theme "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community" which was worldwide advocacy requiring strong, positive actions to address deep-seated structures, institutional and cultural barriers in the male-dominated industry.

Fiji, as a member State of IMO and a hub of seafaring industry in the Pacific, also celebrated the empowerment of women in September this year through the World Maritime Day celebration, recognising women who have worked and are working in the industry.

Gender Equality was also an important agenda in the Energy and Transport Ministers' meeting in Samoa, where the Ministers from the region endorsed the Regional Strategy for Women in Maritime for 2020-2024. The commitment to implement involved priority actions on the strategy include collecting, through national and regional networks, reliable and accurate data and information on women employment in the Pacific maritime sector, supporting national women in maritime networks to conduct in-country promotion and visibility campaigns in schools and communities.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker Sir, Government remains strongly committed to improving the lives of the all Fijians in ensuring access to clean safe water and proper sanitation as well as reasonable access to transportation. Thank you, Honourable Speaker and God Bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Vijay Nath for his contribution to the debate on His Excellency's Address and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Filipe Tuisawau. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the Address by His Excellency the President, the Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konrote in the opening of Parliament on 12th November, 2019.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members: It is interesting that His Excellency's Address in paragraph 3 states, and I quote; "the quality of our leadership in these formative years will be defining for our political system".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, anyone can be a leader. There are leaders who do good and there are leaders who do bad and employ force, fear and propaganda.

Saddam Hussein and Robert Mugabe comes to mind and, of course, all *coup* leaders, however noble their professor intentions to be. Let me refer to some key characteristics of a good leader and these are honesty, integrity, they also delegate powers, empowerment and empathy.

On honesty and integrity, the 34th President of the United State of America, Dwight Eisenhower once said, and I quote:

“The supreme quality of leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, football field, in an army or in an office.”

Honesty and integrity are two important ingredients which make a good leader. How can you expect your followers to be honest when you lack these qualities yourself? Leaders succeed when they stick to their values and core beliefs but without ethics, this will not be possible. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there have been many examples that we have seen that shows that honesty and integrity does not reside in the leadership qualities of FijiFirst.

With regards to delegation and empowerment, we all understand that one cannot do anything right, so it is important for a leader to focus on key responsibilities while leaving the rest to others. By that I mean empowering your followers and delegating task to them. If you continue to micro-manage your subordinates, it will develop a lack of trust and more importantly you will not be able to focus on important matters as you should be.

Now this is what one would expect a competent leader to do, however, Mr. Speaker, sadly in the case of our leadership, Prime Minister Bainimarama has engaged in what can only be described as wilful dereliction of his duties and concentrated powers invested in him as Prime Minister to his Attorney-General. He gladly receives pay and allowance that is excessive but has given away the bulk of his responsibilities to his Attorney-General. We have a Cabinet, Mr. Speaker, but, there is no such thing as collective responsibility because it is really a Cabinet of one plus another.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister nor any of his Cabinet has ever presented to Parliament any accounting of their multiple overseas trips. No one knows what the trips were for, how many people were involved, how much it cost and how successful the trips were. There is no accounting to Parliament for all the trips that have been undertaken, for example the recent trip to Europe to acquire the Fiji Airways Airbus totally unbecoming of national leadership. Was it really necessary for the Honourable Minister for Economy and all the hangers-on to go, or is that the responsibility of Fiji Airways?

These large overseas entourages are expensive and irresponsible use of taxpayer funds in terms of not only that but calculating roughly the amount that is spent, it could be in excess of \$150,000 or even close to \$200,000. That also goes for the UN Periodical Review on Human Rights Issues to Geneva which came to about \$121,000. What I am emphasising, Honourable Speaker, are these large entourages really necessary if you look at it from the cost effective basis. Some of my colleagues had touched on, those who presented at what they actually presented there and the conflict of interest which has emanated from those presentations.

Back to leadership, this negative aspect of control and micro-managing is already a pattern at all levels of Government because subordinates especially in the Civil Service are all fearful of displeasing their superiors. This is more so when they are now under contract and contracts performance have been used for non-renewals and they are becoming unwilling to make any decisions in case they displease the

Minister or in the end they do not accurately report information. We have received numerous complaints and emails from civil servants whose contracts have not been renewed based on the basis which is unclear, which is not really based on performance but non-favouritism.

Last but certainly not the least is the ability to show empathy. Leaders should develop empathy with citizens without bias or vindictiveness. The Prime Minister maintains unfortunately his dictatorial style of leadership which is word of empathy and because for fame this would be a sign of weakness in the national leadership. There can be no better display of the Prime Minister's lack of empathy on his assault on the President of the National Federation Party, Honourable Tikoduadua. What grotesque hypocrisy is for the Prime Minister and his Honourable Members of Parliament to be speaking against violence and abuse in Parliament one day and assaulting a fellow Member of Parliament within the Parliamentary complex on the next day.

Not only that, in terms of the conduct of the Privileges Committee, we see as mentioned by other Honourable Members the affected party is suspended and not the offender. Surely the Honourable Prime Minister has not shown any remorse or regret for what he did...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this matter that the Honourable Member is raising has already been very deliberately discussed. The ruling has been made by Parliament and as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member is trying to open up a case that has already been dealt with.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Member, a Point of Order was raised and I emphasised this yesterday on two Standing Orders so take note of that.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I am trying to emphasis a point here on the quality of leadership as we move forward, in particular, with the Attorney-General's immediate reaction after that incident and the first action was to deny it. The qualities we see in that incident is lack of empathy, stubbornness and unwillingness to admit a wrong which is a characteristic of leadership since 2006 up to now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those who inflicted abuse on innocent citizens have made no effort at all to take responsibility for what they did, to show remorse, apologise or reconcile or to properly compensate. It is the very least that citizens should expect from any leader because our leaders should possess integrity, honesty and be able to demonstrate empathy and compassion towards every citizen.

I now touch on the concept of statesmanship. Statesmanship the practice of a statesman, usually a politician or other notable public figure who has had a long and respected career in politics or government at the national and international level. They are often referred to as "statesman" and conveys a quality of leadership that organically brings people together, a spirit of caring for others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately we have seen in the last decade that this has not been the case, in particular, within Parliament. We have numerous times proposed bipartisanship and the need to work together. Apparently we have come to a dead end when there is no progress. To-date and the leadership

not only has shown the negative qualities that I have described, they have shown the inability to compromise, the inability to reach consensus and those Honourable Speaker, Sir, that is what Fiji needs now, those qualities. Unfortunately it is absent and those qualities should be shown by the Government who is now running our country because they are in power and they have the ability to bring the various political stakeholders together. It is with much regret that I state today that, that has not happened and we have not progressed. The question is; what should we do?

I now touch on the 2013 Constitution issue and how His Excellency the President has mentioned that. It is very superficial and unacceptable for our Head of State to determine the legitimacy and validity of the Constitution, the supreme legal document in any nation through a "Hashtag - Our Constitutional Challenge". FijiFirst must get back to reality and stop living in dreamland.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Constitution is a partnership, it is not just one side. What we have heard so far is just the views of one side of the House, without any due consideration for consensus or compromise. In any political situation in any country, if you look at the history of conflict, we must reach consensus and compromise; both political sides. And we on this side of the House are not just MPs, we are here representing 50 percent of the population and in particular the indigenous people and also of course the rest of the population. We are bringing in their views and that must be respected and negotiated.

The myth - vote now has equal value, the continuing myths of "one person equals one vote equals one value. There is an interesting article by Professor Wadan Narsey who shares valuable insights.

Over the years we have heard Fiji has the most democratic electoral system ever in which Indo-Fijians are now equal to Indigenous Fijians which is one person, one vote, one value. The 1970, 1990 and 1997 Constitutions advocated ethnic voting whereas the 2013 Constitution has removed this provision and every citizen of Fiji is now on one roll.

The basic provision is one person, one vote, one value. Equality and dignity of every citizen is the rallying cry. One of the myths is that all previous electoral systems were biased against Indo-Fijians. Of course, previous electoral systems had ethnic constituencies called Fijian, Indian and Generals and there were some small biases, mostly in favour of the Generals. However, these ethnic constituencies were created after painful compromise between political leaders of those times to give emotional security to Indigenous Fijians who were afraid that the numerically superior would dominate elections.

In those years there were even mixed constituencies called "cross-voting" (1970 Constitution), Open constituencies (1997 Constitution) in which citizens could stand and would vote-effectively common rolls. The electoral system under the 1970 Constitution did not stop the National Federation Party from winning the first 1977 Election nor the NFP/Labour Coalition in the 1987 Election. They could hardly be called biased.

In the 2006 Election results which Honourable Bainimarama has repeatedly claimed as "ethnically biased", it had both Open and Common Roll constituencies. The proportional seats in Parliament held in aggregate by the FLP and NFP was 44 percent, only slightly less than their share of total votes, and the SDL/SVT aggregate 49 percent of the votes and a slightly higher 51 percent seats. With similar results prevailing in 1999 and 2001 under the 1997 system which was clearly not racially biased. Indeed in 1999 the largest Indo-Fijian dominated party, FLP managed to win control.

It is a blatant lie and propaganda to keep repeating that the 1997 Constitution Electoral System was ethnically biased. We should all take note that the votes are not discriminatory as stated continuously by the FijiFirst or the Government.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The other, Honourable Speaker, regarding the current electoral system. I had mentioned how the 1997 electoral systems were not actually biased as shown by the election results. Even the current one, we have the leader, the popularity of the leader has taken some of them into Parliament. That is the one which is biased and he has managed to take maybe half of them into Parliament in order to make up the numbers. So, there is a ridiculous propaganda that one vote, one value, one system will end racism and this is believed by many. There is also the belief that these imposed legal arrangements will do away racism. Racism cannot be done away by legalistic impositions, it is something which we need to discuss from the heart and deal with it through mutual consensus and through open and genuine discussions.

We can say that racism have worsened since the 2006 *coup*. We have received numerous complaints about racism in the workplace and even within the Ministry of Economy under the Honourable Minister for Economy and there is a detailed complaint which came, an email, and I will forward it to the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Multi-Party Government was a key strength of the 1997 Constitution and it has been removed by the 2013 Constitution. If that had been in place, we would have had a government of national unity. But that has been rejected and today, we continue to be adversarial in this House and we cannot even reach consensus on even simple passing of Bills, et cetera. Even with the 2013 Constitution which was imposed on the people, we cannot even have a bipartisan Committee. So, the fundamental question is, where are we moving?

Let me remind the FijiFirst Government and they keep on harping about the 2013 Constitution, what is the legitimacy of that Constitution? Is it valid? The fact, as mentioned by our Honourable Members, it has never been validated by the people. There has been one or two court cases which have clearly stated that our Constitution cannot be reviewed or abrogated, other than what is specified in the Constitution.

Justice Anthony Gates once gave a ringing endorsement of the lawful 1997 Constitution. It is not possible for any man to tear up the Constitution. He has no authority to do so. The Constitution remains in place until amended by Parliament.

Honourable, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what disturbs me about the 2013 Constitution is Section 28(2) that states, and I quote:

“Any *iTaukei* land acquired by the State for a public purpose after the commencement of this Constitution under Section 27 or under any written law shall revert to the customary landowners if the land is no longer required by the State”.

The key here is, “after the commencement of this Constitution”, so what happens to all land acquired by the State before 2013? The people of Suvavou have been taking their case to court, they have written and signed a petition on the Botanical Gardens. And in Section 8 of the Crown Land Act, all lands acquired by the State must be returned if it is no longer used for the public purpose by the State. The State is utilising a lot of these land for commercial purposes and it should be returned. However, this 2013 Constitution nullifies that section.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I address in particular the Honourable Minister for Employment, the tripartisan, tripartite partnerships in the Industrial Relations Report. We have raised the issue of tripartisan and this has not been addressed until today.

The other issue, before I take my seat, is the review of the minimum wages in April 2019. They had engaged the consultant and this is our concern with regards to the rising cost of living, but nothing has been done. There is no progress, and we are still waiting for the result of that. There was supposed to be wide stakeholder consultations but there is no result, nothing has happened.

I conclude, Sir, by stating that we have reached a stalemate in terms of the governance of this nation. We have seen the economic deterioration. The figures are clear, the last update from the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Honourable Attorney-General. The figures are clear and constitutional issues have not been addressed, so it is clearly a stalemate.

And in a stalemate someone has to go. His Excellency the President has already addressed us so I am asking His Excellency to take action because the Government of the day cannot progress anything. They cannot progress constitutional negotiations and they cannot progress the economy, so for him to call elections and should call the Government to resign. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Tuisawau for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, the time moves on. We have come to the end of this part of the Order Paper. We still have other parts of the Order Paper that we need to look at.

Honourable Members, I have been informed that there are no Bills today but that we will have Bills for consideration tomorrow as the last item. So, that brings us to the end of this Sitting. I thank all Honourable Members for their contributions.

Yesterday, I reminded you of Standing Order 45(4)(c) and Standing Order 66(2) with regards to the timings of the speeches. Timings have been alright so far, so let us stick to that.

Also, Honourable Members, I am told and you have been informed earlier that tomorrow is World Children's Day and the colour for tomorrow is blue. But, on a final note, because we had anticipated having the Bills today, dinner has been prepared. So when we adjourn, you can have dinner before you go home.

On that note, Honourable Members, we adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.24 p.m.