

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

SATURDAY, 24TH DECEMBER, 2022

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Proclamation	1
Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance	1-2
Election of Speaker	2-5
Election of Deputy Speaker	5-6
Election of Prime Minister	6-7
Election of Leader of the Opposition	8
Adoption of Standing Orders	8-9
Adjournment	9

SATURDAY, 24TH DECEMBER, 2022

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to notice.

The Secretary-General read the Prayer.

PROCLAMATION

The proclamation issued by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji appointing the time and place of the meeting of Parliament was read by the Secretary-General.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Members subscribed to the Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance and took their seats in Parliament:

Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar
Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama
Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Aliko Bia
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel
Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica
Hon. Sashi Kiran
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar
Hon. Shalen Kumar
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Ioane Naivalurua
Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua
Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu
Hon. Vatimi Tidara Tuinasakea Kaunitawake Rayalu

Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy
Hon. Jese Saukuru
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Rinesh Rajesh Sharma
Hon. Agni Deo Singh
Hon. Charan Jeath Singh
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya
Hon. Pio Tikoduadua
Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna
Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva
Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau
Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu
Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna
Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure
Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu
Hon. Ifereimi Vasu
Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea
Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo
Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Secretary-General, I move that:

His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau do take the Chair as Speaker of Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I second the motion.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public who are watching from the comfort of their home; *yadra, ram ram, salaam* and good morning to you all. I have much pleasure in introducing my nominee, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau. He was born on 5th July, 1941 and is married to Adi Koila Nailatikau with one son and one daughter. His career started in 1962 when he joined the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). He served as the Commander of the RFMF from 1982 to 1987.

Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was the President of the Republic of Fiji from 2009 to 2015. His first appointment was from 5th November, 2009 to 11th November, 2012. He was then re-appointed as President of the Republic of Fiji from 12th November, 2012 to 11th November, 2015. He has had a long and distinguished career in the Military, Diplomatic Services and Government.

From 2001 to 2006, he served as the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was also the Chair of the Parliamentary Appropriation Committee and the House Committee. He served as a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs from July 2000 to September 2001. On 5th October, 2006 he was appointed as the Ambassador in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 8th January, 2007, he was appointed as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, after which he served as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Provincial Development

and Multi-Ethnic Affairs. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, in his career, has spent 20 years in the Military and 17 years in the Diplomatic Services.

On 14th June, 2015, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was appointed the UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador for the Pacific Region. He had previously served as the UNAIDS Special Representative for the Pacific. In October 2004, he chaired the first Conference of Pacific Parliamentarians in the Role of Pacific Parliamentarians in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Ratu Epeli Nailatikau served as the Speaker in the last term of Parliament. He was elected in 2018 as the Speaker and served till 2022. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau has extensive knowledge and hands-on experience on the working of the Civil Service and the role of the Government and stakeholders in development and international diplomacy.

With his outstanding career, together with his excellent public relation appeal needed in outreaching and interfacing with people of this country, I move that Ratu Epeli Nailatikau do take the Chair as the Speaker.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- I now call upon the honourable Professor Biman Prasad for his nomination.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I move that:

Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu do take the Chair as Speaker of Parliament.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Secretary-General, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, the *Turaga Bale na Tui Cakau*, is my high chief as well, as I come from Dreketi and he is the Head of the Tovata Confederacy. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu is no stranger to Parliament and Fiji's political landscape. He first entered Parliament after May 1999 General Elections, being re-elected five times until 2018. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu also served as a senior Cabinet Minister until 2006.

From December 2020, until the General Elections, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu served as the Leader of the Opposition. He is well versed with parliamentary procedures and his sense of fairness and desire to uphold parliamentary democracy at all times is well regarded and respected. We are sure and confident that he will bring to the high office of the Speaker the same wisdom and authority that has become an embodiment of his chiefly role.

Before I conclude, may I also say that Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu's late father, Ratu Glanville Lalabalavu was also an NFP Senator. Today, I am very pleased to move Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu's name as Speaker and I commend him to Parliament.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- Honourable Members, since there is more than one nomination, we shall proceed with the casting of votes by secret ballot, and I call on the Chamber Attendants to distribute the ballot papers to all honourable Members.

Honourable Members, you are requested to write the name of the person whom you wish to vote for on the ballot paper and fold it so that the name written on it cannot be seen.

[Ballot papers were distributed to honourable Members]

Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 17(8), I call upon honourable Alvick

Maharaj and honourable Professor Biman Prasad to come forward and act as scrutineers and observe the count at the table.

[Ballot papers collected and counted in the presence of scrutineers]

The result of the secret ballot are as follows:

1. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau - 27 votes.
2. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu - 28 votes.

Having received the greatest number of votes, I now declare Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu as Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. I now call upon the honourable Professor Biman Prasad and honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau to escort Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu to the Table, to take the Oath of Allegiance and of Office.

[Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu was escorted by honourable Professor Biman Prasad and honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, sworn in as Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji and took his seat in the Chamber]

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members of Parliament and all those tuning in from the comfort of their homes, as your elected Speaker, first and foremost, I thank the Almighty God for this great honour bestowed upon me. I must sincerely thank the honourable Members of Parliament for the trust and confidence placed on me to serve this august Parliament as your Speaker.

Honourable Members, allow me to congratulate you again individually and collectively for your successful elections to this august Parliament. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the support afforded to me by my family, and like all families, they are a pillar of strength and a never-ending source of support and motivation and I thank you most sincerely for your unwavering support through the years.

I must also sincerely thank the Secretary-General to Parliament for her team of dedicated staff who, under immense pressure and public scrutiny, have heeded the call of duty to ensure that all the necessary services of Parliament are up to the professional standards demanded by such a higher office. I dearly acknowledge their steadfast dedication to ensure the necessary services and processes of Parliament are given due consideration without fear or favour.

Honourable Members, the Chair is not a prestigious or glamorous one, but one that is burdened with the high level of responsibility and due diligence since it requires a constant devotion to the roles and principles of parliamentary democracy. I commend the Fijian Elections Office and the Electoral Commission for their successful completion of the Election process that has afforded all Fijians the right to vote for their representative in Parliament, and I must thank all Fijians who had rightfully and dutifully exercised this right.

Whilst we may have many new and young Members entering Parliament for the first time, I also notice the reduction of the number of women representatives. From the largest ever representation of 10 women MPs in 2018 to a low of six in 2022. I sincerely hope that this is an important challenge that we, as decision makers and as a nation, can collectively strive to rectify. But I must acknowledge the efforts of the six brave women who have successfully made it to a space that is already dominated by men. We must also pay all due respect to the courageous women who had put up their hands to be candidates but were unable to join their colleagues in Parliament.

Whilst we could have done better, it is still truly a remarkable demonstration of confidence of our often-conservative society, especially when women are seen as serious decision makers and very important national leaders. At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of our development partners who, despite the challenges of the pandemic-ridden world, have given their support towards the strengthening of parliamentary democracy in Fiji. I sincerely thank the continuous support and assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the Fiji Parliament Support Project, and I extend my utmost gratitude to the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, for their continuous support to the project.

I extend my utmost gratitude to our Inter-Parliamentary friends for their unabated commitment to helping us build and strengthen our democratic institution. They include the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA); our twinning Parliaments of Victoria, Australia; and our Inter-Parliamentary partners, who have supported our progressive journey towards fulfilling the ideals of parliamentary democracy.

Honourable Members, to conclude, it is with great eagerness and energy that I look forward to serving in this role as Speaker, especially to work with you to ensure that our Parliament is effective and relevant to the needs of our people. May God bless us all and may God bless Fiji.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua do take the position of Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I beg to second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, are there any further nominations?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That honourable Viliame Naupoto do take the position of Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I beg to second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, since there is more than one nomination, we shall proceed with the casting of votes by secret ballot.

[Ballot papers distributed to Members by chamber attendants]

Honourable Members, you are requested to write the name of the person whom you wish to vote for on the ballot paper and fold it so that the name written on it cannot be seen. The Chamber Attendants will collect your ballot papers for counting at the Table.

Pursuant to Standing Order 19(7), I call upon the honourable Alvick Maharaj and honourable Lynda Tabuya, to come forward and act as scrutineers and observe the count at the table.

[Ballot papers collected and counted in the presence of scrutineers]

Honourable Members, the result of the secret ballot are as follows:

1. Honourable Viliame Naupoto – 27 votes.
2. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua – 28 votes.

Having received the greatest number of votes, I now declare honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua elected as the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

[Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua was sworn in as Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji]

(Acclamation)

ELECTION OF PRIME MINISTER

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I move:

That honourable Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka do take the position of Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, are there any further nominations?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That candidate number 234, honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, having collected 136,829 votes in the 2022 General Elections and who is the Leader of the FijiFirst Party who won the greatest number of seats to lead the nation as Prime Minister for the next four years.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, since there is more than one nomination, we shall proceed with the casting of votes by secret ballot.

[Ballot papers distributed to Members by chamber attendants]

Pursuant to Standing Order 13(4), I call upon honourable Viliame Gavoka and honourable Alvick Maharaj to come forward and act as scrutineers and observe the count at the table.

[Ballot papers collected and counted in the presence of scrutineers]

Honourable Members, the results of the vote are as follows:

1. Honourable Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka - 28 votes.
2. Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama - 27 votes.

Having received more than half of all the Members votes, I now declare the honourable Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka as an elected Prime Minister of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 13, Parliament will now suspend proceedings so as to allow the honourable Prime Minister and his Cabinet to proceed to State House to take before His Excellency the President the Oath of Allegiance of Office which the President must administer. When that is concluded, honourable Members, then Parliament will resume to complete the remaining items on today's Order Paper. The Secretary-General will notify all honourable Members through the Whips the resumption time so as to conclude today's items on the Order Paper.

Honourable Members, we now suspend Parliament.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.39 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.26 p.m.

ELECTION OF LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That honourable Josai Voreqe Bainimarama be appointed as Leader of the Opposition.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being no further nominations, I, therefore, declare honourable Josai Voreqe Bainimarama elected as Leader of the Opposition.

(Acclamation)

ADOPTION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That pursuant to Section 71 of the Constitution, the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, published and gazetted on 1st April, 2019, be adopted by Parliament.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion is purely procedural in nature. The Standing Orders lays out the rules for the order and conduct of business and the proceedings of Parliament.

Following the administration of oath or affirmation earlier today, it is envisaged that the Parliamentary Standing and Select Committees will meet soon and, therefore, it is pertinent that Parliament adopts the current Standing Orders so as to allow Parliament and its Committees to start and continue with business accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, Section 71 of the Constitution provides, and I quote:

“Parliament may make standing orders and rules for the order and conduct of business and proceedings in Parliament and its committees.”

Standing Order 128(2) also further provides, and I quote:

“Immediately following the first sitting of Parliament after each election, the Standing Orders Committee shall be automatically convened to –

- (a) review the Standing Orders; and
- (b) report to Parliament within 14 sitting days with recommended amendments to the Standing Orders if any, in which case, on the third sitting day after the tabling of the report, the Speaker must put the question ‘That the amendments recommended by the Standing Orders Committee ... be adopted by Parliament’.”

Mr. Speaker, in order for the Standing Order 128(2) to take place, Parliament on its first sitting after a general election (which is today) must adopt the Standing Orders in its current form. I, therefore, seek support from all honourable Members for this motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a point of clarification. The honourable Member, I assume over this sort of long introduction is basically the motion is that we adopt the Standing Orders on the first day of April 2019 I assume, that is what it is. Yes? We have no objection to that, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being no objection, I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament for his right of reply.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments to add to that.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 10(2), Parliament will now adjourn until a time appointed by His Excellency the President to hear the His Excellency the President's Address. All honourable Members will be notified accordingly.

Honourable Members, before I adjourn Parliament, I would like to take this opportunity once more to congratulate each and every one of you. I thank each and every one as well for the sacrifice of time, especially today being the 24th but we are here to serve honourable Members. I want to wish you all and your families a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year as we approach the New Year as well. Parliament now stands adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.33 p.m.