

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 27TH MARCH, 2023

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 27TH MARCH, 2023

The Parliament met at 9.40 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs

Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation

Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodoro, Minister for Education

Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services

Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts

Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources

Hon. Ro Filipe Qaranio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport

Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Agni Deo Singh, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations

Hon. Vatimi Tidara Tuinasakea Kaunitawake Rayalu, Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government

Hon. Charan Jeeth Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports

Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry

Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister

Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Assistant Minister of Finance

Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Assistant Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation

Hon. Sashi Kiran, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Home Affairs

Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Hon. Tomasi Niuvalu Tunabuna, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways

Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Housing and Local Government

Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu

Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya

Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala

Hon. Viliame Naupoto

Hon. Premila Devi Kumar

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu

Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Ioane Naivalurua
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Shalen Kumar
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Aliko Bia
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal
Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Rinesh Rajesh Sharma

Absent

Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

Honourable Virendra Lal subscribed to the Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance and took his seat in Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Congratulations, honourable Member. Welcome once again to Parliament and I wish you well in this new term of Parliament.

Honourable Members, I now invite honourable Lal to deliver his Maiden Speech.

Maiden Speech – Hon. V. Lal

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, colleagues, those present in the gallery and viewers; it is, indeed, an honour for me to be sitting in this Parliament and delivering my Maiden Speech.

First of all, I would like to thank the Almighty for blessing and allowing me to reach this far. I would also like to thank my family, especially my wife - Veeneta, my father - Mr. Jawahir Lal and my late mother who must be smiling from above. My children were always there for me when I needed them, thank you all.

How can I forget my friends, neighbours and relatives for their support during my campaign. Thank you very much to all those who voted for me. Without your votes, I would not have been here. I also thank each and everyone of you within Fiji and abroad from the bottom of my heart for supporting me during my campaign, and I look forward for your continued support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to assure all those listening that I will do my level best to serve all Fijians. As a Member of the Opposition, I know that our job is to see that things are done in the correct way with dignity and respect for the betterment of our people and the beloved nation by keeping Government in check. We are committed to ensuring that the Constitution is adhered to, that the rule of law prevails and that there is no discrimination against any

any Fijian, because we all deserve equal opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FijiFirst holds a significant number of seats in this Parliament. In fact, it has the largest number of seats, and it says a lot about the expectation of FijiFirst supporters. The former Prime Minister and the Leader of FijiFirst, Frank Bainimarama, single-handedly registered 136,829 votes. That showed the popularity of our Party Leader.

However, despite receiving the largest number of votes, he has been suspended from Parliament under controversial circumstances. He still is the Leader of our Party and now, in fact, he has become more popular, and so has the FijiFirst.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have heard a number of times in the news media that 57.45 percent of those who voted, voted against FijiFirst. This is true, but people seem to forget that the largest percentage of people voted for us, 42.55 percent. Three other Parties in Parliament had to combine together to form a government, whereas FijiFirst has formed that past two governments on its own.

In the 2022 General Elections, 35.82 percent people voted for People's Alliance, the second largest party in Parliament and 64.18 percent voted against them. Only 8.89 percent of voters voted for NFP, and 91.11 percent voted against them, and SODELPA received only 5.14 percent of the votes, whereas 94.86 percent of the voters voted against them. Out of all the political parties in Parliament, FijiFirst received the highest percentage of votes and the lowest percentage of people voted against it.

The reason I am giving out these figures is for the people to see the full picture rather than receiving selected and incomplete information. Some politicians are giving only selected information to suite their agenda. We were receiving similar sort of misinformation almost throughout the duration of the last Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although this is my second term in Parliament, I would like to give a brief introduction of myself. I am originally from Madhvani, Rakiraki. I am a son of a sugarcane farmer. My father is 83 years old and stays with me in Valelevu. I attended Madhvani Indian School and Penang Sangam High School in Rakiraki.

After tertiary education, I taught at Penang Sangam High School for five years before moving to Nasinu in 1993. For more than two decades, I worked in the mainstream media as a reporter, news editor and programmes director. I also operated a shop in Valelevu for 10 years before being sworn in as a Member of Parliament in the last Government, and I worked as a Senior Information Officer at the Department of Information in the Ministry of Communications.

As per my community service, I served as the National Secretary of Shree Sanatan Dharam Pratindhi Sabha of Fiji, the largest organisation of Hindus in Fiji. I also served as the National Secretary of the Hindi Parishad Fiji, which consists of all the major Hindu faith-based organisations in Fiji. I am also the pioneer secretary of the Vatuwaqa Funeral Rites Facility that was built by the Government.

I am married to Veneeta and we have three daughters, two of whom are married. I am also blessed with a grandson - Raghav.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am a staunch Hindu, a Sanatan follower but I also believe in the religion of humanity. Bhagwaan Shree Satya Sai Baba once said, and I quote:

“If you are a Hindu - become a good Hindu. If you are a Muslim - become a good Muslim and if you are a Christian - become a good Christian but become a good human being and follow the religion of humanity.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after all, we are all God’s children. His Excellency the President in his Address spoke about uniting the people of Fiji however, here we have a government whose supporters are making indecent gestures in front of the FijiFirst office and taking pictures and many are now resorting to making racist and discriminatory comments on almost a daily basis on social media.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what examples are we setting for our future generations? Is this the change people wanted? Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was emotionally disturbed when it was said that Fiji is being changed to a secular state since 2013 and thus has been the cause of morale deterioration among our children over the years. This is a lie! In fact, a secular state allows its citizens to carry out their prayers and religious activities in their own ways without any interference from the Government and I have no idea how this has caused the morale deterioration among our children.

Those who seek to divide us, those who seek political gain from this discord and disagreement, those who make false promises are not leaders. Leaders bring us together, leaders put the interest of the nation before their own and speak the truth. We need decisive leadership that brings us together, that has a plan and that does not risk our future and that is the legacy of FijiFirst.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the supreme law dictates that no religion should be given preference in official proceedings in Fiji in any way, shape or form. Yet, right from the start of his Maiden Speech, the honourable Attorney-General took it upon himself to pepper his comments with references to Christianity and Jesus Christ. His first words in Parliament should have been directed at the Speaker, that is what is laid down as the proper conduct of any Member of Parliament but the honourable Attorney-General started off with a quote from the Bible before he proceeded to the formal start of his speech.

It was a clear breach of parliamentary procedure and the fact that it came from the chief legal officer of the State is extremely disturbing. There are laws that a great many people do not like, whether it is the laws on the use of *marijuana* or the Public Order Act that prevents spontaneous demonstrations, but the law is the law and until any law is altered by the proper process, every citizen is obliged to comply with it including honourable Siromi Turaga on the constitutional requirement of a secular state.

Mr. Speaker Sir, people have a right to expect that our politicians conduct themselves in Parliament in measured tones and with measured decorum, keeping emotional outburst to a minimum and setting an example for the rest of the nation of moderation and judgment. But to the astonishment of much of the watching public, honourable Siromi Turaga adopted the pose of a fundamentalist preacher. It came across as a sermon, not a maiden speech.

Mr. Speaker Sir, a lot has been said in Parliament about government debt and His Excellency also raised this in his Address. Sir, Fiji’s debt is at sustainable levels. This has been confirmed by credible international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), ANZ Bank and other international credit rating agencies. Fiji’s debt to GDP ratio was on a declining trend since 2009 and reached around 43 percent pre-*TC Winston*.

The large reconstruction spending after *TC Winston* increased the debt ratio, however, it was still below 50 percent of GDP. After the COVID-19 crisis, the increase in borrowings and large contraction of GDP led the debt to GDP ratio increasing over 80 percent. Every single country in the world has increased its debt post-COVID. Had the FijiFirst Government not borrowed during

COVID-19, the economy would have collapsed, we would have had a large devaluation, social challenges would have increased as price levels would have skyrocketed. Through our decisive leadership and the various hard measures, we came out of the COVID-19 crisis successfully.

Mr. Speaker Sir, it has also been said in Parliament that a lot of people are living below the poverty line. Extreme poverty is almost non-existent in Fiji. The World Bank defines “extreme poverty” as a person living on less than \$1.90 per day. Poverty rate stood at 24.1 percent as per the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). This is one of the lowest levels of poverty ever registered in Fiji.

The 2002-2003 Fiji’s poverty rate was 35 percent, 2008-2009 it was 31 percent, 2013-2014 it was 28 percent and 2019-2020 poverty rate was 24.1 percent. Based on current population estimates, it is clear that under the FijiFirst Government, almost 100,000 Fijians have been lifted out of poverty. For nearly a decade, FijiFirst has created jobs, supported our tourism sector, kept our families safe, expanded our roads, continued to bring telecommunications, electricity and drinkable water to more neighbourhoods and homes, improved our schools and hospitals, upgraded our roads and built new ones, protected our natural resources and took steps to make us more resilient against climate change.

Mr. Speaker Sir, on education, FijiFirst believes education is not a privilege for a few, but a right for the many. Our party spurred an education revolution based on merit that has empowered people of all backgrounds, from all ethnicities, from all provinces and from all walks of life including young women and men alike. We believed that our government had an obligation to create opportunities to make sure that young children benefit from early childhood to primary to secondary education and that young adults can build their skills and chase their dreams through advanced education at universities and technical schools.

Now, looking at the current government’s indecision in regards to TELS, a lot of tertiary students are uncertain about their future. We know that in order to fulfil its unrealistic election promise, the uneven three-legged Government is planning to write off TELS and replace it with scholarships but at what cost?

Mr. Speaker Sir, here are the hard facts. Under FijiFirst, almost 9,000 tertiary students annually benefitted from TELS and Toppers schemes. This delusional Government says it will write-off all past TELS loans and going forward will replace it with scholarships. However, this Government is deliberately not telling the Fijian public if the entire almost 9,000 tertiary students will all be given scholarships or not. Surely after writing off TELS worth around \$800 million, this Government will not have enough money to pay for 800 scholarships every year.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Do not worry about that.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. LAL.- Maybe they will print some money.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that, only some of the 800 annual tertiary students will be eligible for scholarships. The question also arises as to how these handful of scholarships be awarded. Will the scholarships be based on ethnic lines, religious lines, provincial lines or based on who you know?

The most important question, Mr. Speaker is, what will happen to the thousands of tertiary students every year who will miss out on the scholarships? Where will they get the money to educate themselves? Which bank will give them a loan? How many of their parents will dig into their FNPF funds, if they have any? The bitter truth is that because of this Government's silly and unrealistic promises, thousands of Fijian students will lose out on getting tertiary qualifications for as long as this Government is in power.

Sir, Fiji is a young, vibrant and an educationally-motivated nation. More than 65 percent of Fijians are under the age of 35. As our young people pursue advanced higher educational studies, we need realistic promises and not promises that mislead our future generations.

(Inaudible interjection)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Who wrote your speech?

MR. SPEAKER.- Carry on now.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to give some facts about the Fijian economy. Fiji recorded its strongest period of post-independence economic growth in the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fijian economy registered its nine years of consecutive economic growth ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. V. LAL.- ... from 2010 to 2018 underpinned by rising productivity, increased public sector investment in infrastructure development, growing private sector activity supported by high business confidence and overall political and economic stability. This was one of the longest periods of sustained economic growth in Fiji which led to major improvements in job creations, infrastructure development, improved access to better public services, more income generating opportunities, increased asset and wealth accumulation by Fijians and significant advancement in the overall living standards.

During this period, our GDP doubled from \$6 billion to almost \$12 billion at the end of 2019. Sir, GDP per capita or income per person on average increased from around \$6,600 to over \$13,000 per person. Foreign reserves increased to over \$3.6 billion compared to just around \$500 million in 2006. This is the highest level of reserves in our history and reflects the strong balance of payment position.

Liquidity levels in the financial sector increased to over \$2.5 billion. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, following this period of economic boom, Fiji had three years of consecutive economic decline induced by the devastating COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the marginal contraction of 0.9 percent in 2019 underpinned by the slowing global economy, the Fijian economy recorded its largest contraction of 17 percent in 2020 and 5.1 percent in 2021. This was completely beyond our control, but we did everything possible to minimise the impact on our people by paying close to \$500 million in unemployment support and other relief measures. We also ensured that other initiatives designed prior to the pandemic to support Fijians continued, despite the large decline in tax revenues. This included continuation of all social welfare payments, free education, water and electricity subsidies, transportation assistance, tertiary education support, civil service salaries and provision of all other public services.

The FijiFirst Government stood firm to keep the economy afloat during the pandemic and laid the foundation for a fast and strong economic rebound with a focus to get people back to work. We managed to access the vaccines on time and rolled out one of the world's fastest vaccination drives. We supported our national airline - Fiji Airways with a government guarantee to keep it afloat as we recognised the vital role the airline plays in getting tourists to our shores. We worked with development partners to access large budget support grants and concessional loans to beef up foreign exchange reserves to avoid a devaluation and drying up of liquidity in the banking sector that would have induced a sharp increase in interest rates.

Since then, the economy has been recovering much faster than expected. Whether it has continued to recover or not, it will be revealed in the Reserve Bank of Fiji's Quarterly Report that will be due next month. There were forecasts that the 2022 economic growth would be around 15.6 percent and Fiji was one of the fastest recovering economies in the world. The tourism industry is again booming, economic prospects have improved and there is a lot of optimism. However, all this is only possible with decisive and visionary leadership.

In conclusion Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need a leadership that guarantees stability, equality, security and equal opportunities for all Fijians. As the former Prime Minister and the leader of FijiFirst Frank Bainimarama has always said, "no one should be left behind". Some Government Members in their Maiden Speeches have said change is here. We, on this side of Parliament, believe that we were the change that made Fiji stronger.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. V. LAL.- Real change means believing in each other, working together and helping each other. Real change means real plans for our future. Real change guarantees stability, certainty and equality, and this is what FijiFirst gave.

With those words Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly thank you for the opportunity and look forward to your guidance. I once again would like to thank each and every one of you listening in and all those who supported me. May God guide us and bless us all, and may God bless our beloved Fiji.

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member. At the same time, I would like to apologise to you in not readily having the lectern prepared since you made your speech.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Friday, 17th February, 2023 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and all those joining us in the gallery, and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Extension of Time - Cybercrime Treaty

Honourable Members, I received a request from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence seeking an extension of time with respect to the tabling of the Committee's Report on the Cybercrime Treaty. I have subsequently approved the request, so as to allow the Committee to thoroughly scrutinise the Treaty before tabling its Report in Parliament.

Resignation of Leader of the Opposition

Honourable Members, on the matter of the resignation of the Leader of the Opposition, I confirm receiving the resignation from the Leader of the Opposition on 8th March, 2023. I referred the matter to the Privileges Committee and sought clarification from the Committee on whether there were any further aspects or impact on the privileges matter to consider before proceeding to deal with the resignation.

I can also confirm that I have now received the response from the Privileges Committee stating that under its remit, there were no further comments to make nor actions that the Committee would undertake on the matter. In that respect, honourable Members, my Office has now proceeded with the processing of the resignation pursuant to the Electoral Act 2014.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I table my Report please, allow me to express, on behalf of the Government and I suppose, on behalf of the Opposition, and every Member of this august Parliament, to extend to you our most sincere condolences in the passing of one illustrious member of your chiefly family of *A i Sokula*, Ratu Epeli Ganilau. He was a noble representative of the family, an illustrious member of the *vanua o Cakadrove* and a distinguished Military leader. We pray that he will rest in God's eternal peace.

The following Reports were tabled by honourable Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

1. Public Rental Board – 2020 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 109 of 2022*);
2. Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Pte Limited – Annual Report 2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 103/2022*);
3. Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation – Annual Report for the Financial Period 1st August 2019 – 31st July 2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 97 of 2022*);
4. Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation – Annual Report for the Financial Period 1st August 2020 – 31st July 2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 98 of 2022*; and

5. Ministry of iTaukei Affairs Annual Report 2017-2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 10 of 2023*).

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

1. Fiji Meat Industry Board – Annual Report 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 106 of 2022*); and
2. Reserve Bank of Fiji – August 2021 – July 2022 Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 12 of 2022*).

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption – Annual Report 1st August 2017 – 31st July 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 36 of 2019*).

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Report of the Auditor-General – Republic of Fiji – Report on Special Investigation (*Parliamentary Paper No. 272 of 2020*).

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources – Annual Report August 2019 – July 2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 34 of 2023*)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that the Mid-Year Fiscal Statement – Actual Expenditure 1 August 2022 to 31 January 2023 is for your information only and will not be referred to any Standing Committee.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report – Fiji Police Force August 2018-July 2019 Annual Report

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the annual review of the Fiji Police Force August 2018 – July 2019 Annual Report. This Report was reinstated from the previous term of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee is established under Section 109(2)(e) of the Standing Orders of Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the performance of the Fiji Police Force (FPF) for the fiscal year August 2018 to July 2019, in tandem with its operations and administration.

The strategic theme ‘Synchronising Institutional Effectiveness’, undertaken by the institution looked at the annual operational plan for the above fiscal year, measured against the activities and strategies through five core Outputs and 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), that will align and contribute towards the national outcome of maintaining law and order.

The Committee recognises the previous Government’s intent of progressively resourcing the FPF as a modern police organisation through budgetary allocations with the key emphasis on safety and security at the national level. Mr. Speaker, the Committee, after reviewing the Report, identified pertinent issues confronting the FPF institution today. Some of the issues identified and

observed are that the Committee:

- (1) Noted that the use of the latest satellite geospatial drone and communication technologies would assist the FPF and partner agencies to address the chronic traffic congestion on Fiji roads.
- (2) Noted that there were not enough senior positions held by women, despite the FPF's attempt that there is still space to increase the number of women in senior positions within the Force.
- (3) Noted that there is an increasing prevalence of crimes against women and children and suicide in Fiji's society, as reflected in the reporting period and will warrant positive intervention measures.
- (4) Noted that in recent times, next of kin have not been able to process or procure legal claims or ownership to death and insurance benefits due to the cases of the seven years' absence clause where no statute applies. Therefore, there are merits to recommending for the changes to the law, where it be amended to the existing framework of the Inquest Act 1967, or creating a new piece of legislation as in the case of the United Kingdom where they have introduced the Presumption of Death Act 2013.
- (5) Noted that the FPF is continuing with its five-year reform and restructure project.
- (6) Noted the initial development of KPIs in the FPF, emanated from the initiative of the then Strategic Framework for Change Coordinating Office (SFCCO) in 2009. The fiscal year under review warrants an evaluation of the KPIs aligned to the 20-Year Development Plan 2017 – 2036 Goals of Government.
- (7) Noted that the Annual Report does not provide gender desegregated data.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commends the good work of the organisation in progressing this Annual Report. While applauding the achievements of the FPF as an institution, the Committee had identified some opportunities for improvement. These are outlined in the Report.

I take this opportunity to thank the Commissioner and all staff, including officers on mission areas abroad and their families for a job well done and their dedication to securing the nation for all Fijians and visitors to our shores.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Members of the previous Committee for the work that they had undertaken towards compiling this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

That a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I will adjourn Parliament for tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.26 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.01 a.m.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE
MUNICIPAL COUNCILS' 2018-2019 AND 2019-2020 AUDIT REPORTS**

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on a Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, in the interest of transparency, accountability and to take away the conflict of interest, I am asking Government to review the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee.

This has no personal question on the integrity of the honourable Member. It is just the basic fact that he is the honourable Assistant Minister of Finance, holding the position as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance knows this very well.

It is the responsibility of the Public Accounts Committee to chase the funds to every institution that have been funded by the Government coffers. I think it is a bit unfair to ask the honourable Assistant Minister of Finance to actually sit and Chair the very Committee that has been tasked to look at the transparency of actually following the dollar in every institution that has been funded by Government.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will allow the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to take the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is actually quite interesting and I am happy that the honourable Member has raised this issue because this is a very important issue.

I want to take him back, Mr. Speaker, and we have had a lot of debate on the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee, as you know. It was always a convention for the Opposition to Chair the Public Accounts Committee and some of them, sitting on that side...

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Can I just elaborate on that? I think the honourable Minister is coming from a different angle. All we are asking from the Government...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I have not finished, but he will get his chance.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please, take your seat. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister is replying to the very Order that you have raised.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, it is essentially to help you, Sir, and help this Parliament.

I just wanted to take him back, and he should jog his memory a little bit. The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, by convention in most countries and here in Fiji in particular, Mr. Speaker, was always Chaired by a Member of the Opposition. I was appointed the Chairman of the

Public Accounts Committee, some of those honourable Members sitting on the other side today, were part of the brigade which brought a motion and changed the Standing Order to give themselves the Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Very poor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...to review the reports that they had produced since 2006 and not presented to Parliament. Here, this honourable Member has the audacity...

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- To see the point.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... to talk about conflict of interest.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I will tell you, why there is no conflict of interest. He has the audacity to talk about conflict of interest.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I haven't finished.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What is your Point of Order? Quote the Standing Order, what is your Point of Order?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Koya, resume your seat and I will ask the honourable Deputy Prime Minister to round off his reply to the Standing Order that was raised by honourable Koroilavesau. That reminds me as well, being a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, of the happenings that occurred that led to the amendment of the Standing Orders. So I am well-versed with that, honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, let me finish what I was saying, that here is a Member who was part of that brigade to change the Standing Order, has the audacity to come into this Parliament today...

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...sitting in the Opposition and saying there is a conflict of interest. I will tell why there is no conflict of interest. At least until such time, Mr. Speaker, that we finish...

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...looking at all the Annual Reports, the audited accounts that happened under their Government...

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...and it is absolutely right for us to have an Opposition Member as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, even though honourable Immanuel is the Assistant Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker...

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- What is the problem?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee...

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...he is looking at the Annual Reports, the audited accounts of what happened during their time when they were in Government. They should have a little bit of shame, Mr. Speaker, to bring this kind of issues because...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...we are setting the standards by saying that we will have an Assistant Minister...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What, did you want it? Say it!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... chairing the Public Accounts Committee until such time when we review it, if this Government want to review it, it will do so but right now, the Government Member, the honourable Assistant Minister of Finance will Chair the Public Accounts Committee and there is no conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Assistant Minister, you have the floor to move your motion.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Audit Reports on Municipal Councils, which was tabled on 29th August, 2022.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Mr. Chairman, you are given a time of 20 minutes to elaborate on your motion.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Committee and Mover of the motion, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion to review the 2018 to 2019 and 2019 to 2020 Audit Reports on Municipal Councils.

As a background, Sir, the review of the accounts was carried out by the previous Public Accounts Committee. The Committee collectively reviewed 10 municipal audits from 2018 to 2019 Audit Report and five municipal audits from 2019 to 2020 Audit Report. The years of audit, coverage

ranges from 2010, 2012 to 2016, 2018 and 2019. This shows that majority of the municipal council audits are in backlog.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, section 57(1) and (3) of the Local Government Act 1972 establishes the financial accountability and legislative timeframe for Municipal Councils to complete and publish its audited financial reports. The legislative timeframe for the preparation of the financial statement is 31st May and the legislative timeframe to publish the audited financial statement is the 31st August of every year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the findings from the reports at the outset, I will highlight some of the common findings identified in the two reports that were examined by the then Committee. It is important to note that the audit backlog is primarily due to the significant delay in the submission of the draft financial statements to the Office of the Auditor-General - lack of compliance with the financial reporting framework, lack of compliance with the International Accounting Standards and the lack of compliance with the Local Government Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this lack of compliance is reflected in the audit opinion issued by the Office of the Auditor-General. In the 2018 to 2019 Audit Report, the Office of the Auditor-General issued modified or qualified audit opinions on six financial statements that were audited, while eight financial statements were issued with disclaimer of opinion.

In the 2019 to 2020 Audit Report, the Office of the Auditor-General issued one qualified or modified audit opinion on five and five modified or disclaimer of opinion on the financial statements of six Municipal Councils that were audited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee identified the following issues as common across municipalities and necessary action is required to address the following:

- (1) The quality and timeliness of completion and submission of financial statements for audit.
- (2) Internal control issues, and these are recurring issues across all the municipal councils.
- (3) Human resources are in need for those Municipal Councils.
- (4) The need for internal auditors as well as sharing of resources across the Municipal Councils.
- (5) The Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and relevant policies need to be developed by all councils with the assistance of the Ministry of Local Government.
- (6) Needs to be an improvement in record management.
- (7) Reconciliation and bookkeeping knowledge and training is a must.
- (8) Problem with rubbish dump sites.
- (9) Mismanagement of funds, an example is the capital grant being used for operational and other purposes.
- (10) Tender processes not followed.
- (11) Need to strengthen the monitoring the capital projects implementations and timeframe of completion by all municipal heads.
- (12) Lack of monitoring from the Ministry of Local Government on Municipal Councils.
- (13) Absence of municipal council's centralised IT system - they were trying to use their own.
- (14) Absence of Standard Accounting Software that can be used by all municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has some recommendations, which are:

- (1) The Ministry of Local Government should strictly monitor the progress of capital projects implementation to provide better control for future grant disbursement to municipalities for capital projects. There are two capital projects that were discussed during that the Committee's deliberation - Ba Stadium and Sigatoka River-Wall Protection.

- (2) The Ministry of Local Government should place priority in getting all the municipalities audited to be updated.
- (3) The Ministry should include in the Special Administrator or the Chief Executive Officer's terms of engagement KPIs that includes, bring the audited accounts up to-date during their tenure.
- (4) All municipalities should explore with the Ministry of Local Government on the use of a standard accounting software for uniformity of purposes.
- (5) The Committee concurs with the Auditor-General's recommendations and further recommends that the Municipal Councils should use Government grants only for the intended purposes.
- (6) All municipalities should liaise with the Ministry of Local Government to provide staff training in the areas of bookkeeping, application of accounting software, receipting rates recording, reconciliations et cetera. There is a dire need in that area.
- (7) Municipalities should also implement stringent disciplinary measures against staff who continue to disregard the due process.
- (8) The Committee noted the current status of those qualification issues for all municipalities and further recommends that the Ministry of Local Government conducts regular monitoring so that discrepancies identified are addressed in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that the previous administration have been informed through the Committee report and Audit Reports on the issues identified, and actions taken were not enough to address those recurring issues. In this regard, the Committee strongly recommends that immediate action is required by the respective municipalities in working closely with the Ministry of Local Government to improve financial accountability.

In conclusion, the Committee will continue to highlight issues in this august Parliament until these municipalities improve their audit status and strengthen their systems and processes for public funds accountability purposes. With those few words, as the Member moving the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we proceed to the debate by opening the floor, I only wish to remind honourable Members that I have received the list from both, the Opposition Whip and that of the Leader of the Government in Parliament and that three speakers from each side will be speaking. I would like us to agree if they could alternate, as follows:

- (1) Honourable A.A. Maharaj;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics;
- (3) Honourable P.K. Bala
- (4) Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government;
- (5) Honourable P.D. Kumar; and.
- (6) Honourable E.Y. Immanuel.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this time and opportunity to speak on the Report. Basically, this Report was tabled with I, being the Chairperson in the past term, and this was a bipartisan one to which you were also a signatory, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for any country the reflection of the country is how beautiful and stunning their towns and cities are and Fiji being a tourist destination is very important to have towns and cities up to par and expectation of tourists coming to visit Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, turning to the Audit Report, it is important to note that few councils that are covered in both reports, majority of these municipalities are still in backlog. One of the main and

key issues that we identified during our public consultation and consultation with municipalities was that the current appointed CEOs are too involved in dealing with the backlogs and in the process of doing so, what is basically happening is, they are forgoing the responsibilities that are on their shoulders to provide this year's audit report on time.

One thing we discussed, and the Committee decided, is to allow the CEOs and the Special Administrators to come out of these backlogs and start presenting reports on time so that Public Accounts Committee does not waste time dealing with the reports when the management is not there to present before the Public Accounts Committee. As far as the Public Accounts Committee is concerned, it would be rather efficient for the Public Accounts Committee to scrutinize the current report rather than looking at the backlogs that have been there for a number of years.

The delay in audit is also due to no-submission of the draft financials as elaborated by the current Chairperson as legislated that by 31st May annually all financial statements should be submitted to the Auditor-General for scrutiny. There are various reasons which is fully understood by Public Accounts Committee such as records not available or staff have moved on to other organisations, Municipal Councils still using ancient ways of record-keeping in files, now in such a situation is putting immense pressure on the current management to be dealing with audit queries and getting their annual and audit reports up to date.

It would be more realistic and of sense for the Public Accounts Committee to be dealing with the current issues rather than the backlogs. With all efforts made by the Council, Office of the Auditor-General and previous Public Accounts Committees, it is great to see that some Municipal Councils have submitted their accounts for audit to the Office of the Auditor-General for the financial year ending 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to name one, Savusavu Municipal Council has submitted their financials to the Office of the Auditor-General for scrutiny. In view of the audit finding, the Committee noted that majority of the issues identified herewith have been taken into consideration with necessary implementations undertaken by municipalities and these are:

- (1) Municipalities were liaising with the Ministry of Local Government to provide staff training in areas of bookkeeping, application of accounting software, receipting rates, recording and reconciliations so that variances in the financial statements can be minimised.
- (2) A very thorough interview process is being conducted to select the best candidate who is specialised and have knowledge in bookkeeping application of accounting software, receipting rates, recording and reconciliation as this will ensure efficiency and accuracy in accounts and reports. It is, therefore, desirable to adapt to OMRS system to ensure transparency and accountability.
- (3) The Standard Operation Procedures were developed and will be readily available as it provides policies, processes and standard needed for the organisation to succeed. It can benefit the municipalities in reducing errors, increase efficiencies and profitability, creating a safer work environment thus producing guidelines on how to resolve issues and overcome obstacles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Suva City Council has always been rated as one of the efficient municipalities. For instance, it is always seen that the council is investing in parks, building and is more focused in generating revenue through rentals as the council has engaged in a lot of investments and not just relying on rate collection as revenue.

The Suva City Council has ventured into Free Planting Initiative that is being undertaken which is climate and environmental-friendly. The Council continues to provide a place for micro-business which is thriving within the city and creates a bustling center. The Council's ability in maintaining cleanliness through effective solid waste management system and sanitation control is welcoming which has seen the council now managing solid waste for Nasinu Town Council. Therefore, the work done by the council is commended and other municipalities that are not performing up to par should use the performing councils such as the Suva City Council as a benchmark.

The Committee has seen that Municipal Councils are well adopting to OMRS and it can be seen in terms of improved service delivery. If councils are run like a corporate organisation and right people are selected for the right job, the Committee believes that Municipal Councils can obtain substantial growth and there is a huge potential for growth for these councils.

It is evident that after few rounds of consultations with the Committee, improvements can be seen with the councils and at the Ministry level. While the Committee realises that the FijiFirst Government's vision was to give full autonomy to the council and the board on its day to day operations, the Ministry needs to continue to provide an oversight and monitor the functions of the council, at least until such time the Council starts to operate independently.

The Public Accounts Committee will continue to encourage this council to update their audited accounts and put forward strategies and measures to address the pertinent issues that continue to appear in the audit.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion for debate that is before Parliament. The Ministry of Local Government acknowledges the recommendations by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with respect to the Review of Municipal Councils Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to emphasise that the issues highlighted in the Report are legacy issues and the Municipal Councils have designed some practical strategies to help improve and address issues that are highlighted by the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government is focused on making Municipal Councils more accountable, transparent and responsible to the ratepayers. This has been missing for the past 15-odd years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government is focused on making Municipal Councils more accountable, transparent and responsible to the ratepayers. This has been missing for the past 15-odd years. We want the ratepayers to be able to feel that the councils are for them and to address their concerns and needs. These issues or mess have been created by the past government's wrong decisions and one to undermine the Municipal Councils' independence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to respond to the recommendations on the Audit Report on Municipal Councils, as follows – one is on the Ministry of Local Government Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers, and management as a matter of priority to urgently address all the issues that gave rise to the modified audit opinions.

The Ministry has been collaborating with the Municipal Councils to ensure the issues highlighted by the OAG over the years had been implemented to avoid recurrence of matters in the future audit reports and that CEOs for all the councils have been tasked to have appropriate internal control measures to keep checks and balances on the deficiencies identified.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to assist the Municipal Councils to enhance efficiency in their operations, the Ministry has carried out fundamental institutional reforms in the councils. These reforms are carried out through the review of council policies, manuals and implementing strategies and plans and the recruitment of competent personnel to effectively carry out the functions of the councils.

On the issue of improving the quality and timeliness of financial statements to be given utmost priority, Mr. Speaker, Sir ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- *Vinaka*, Maciu.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- ... the Ministry acknowledges the need for the right-skilled personnel to assist the councils in complying with the legislative provisions as far as the finances of the councils are concerned. As such, most councils have recruited a manager of finance and filled in the positions in accounts department. Even some councils are still in their recruitment process of hiring accountants and finance officers with the right qualification and extensive experience which could ensure timely preparation of financial statements and having their accounts audited.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government has modernised the organisations structure of the Municipal Councils to be in accordance with the services provided by the small, medium and large councils. The Ministry comprehends that the “one size fits all” concept will not be practical in this situation considering the sizes of the Municipal Councils, hence the councils have developed new organisational structures according to services provided by them and position titles at their respective councils.

The new organisation structure and new positions, and the role descriptions will be modified in accordance with the position titles. As we speak, the new positions have already been advertised by some councils that have amended their organisational structures. This process will certainly allow the councils to recruit the best candidates for the job. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the councils have switched to International Financial Reporting Standards or IFRS. The reports are statements prepared by these councils and aligned to the required international accounting standards.

On the issue of the Ministry to consider establishment of robust and capital audit risk and to specifically look at the quality and timeliness of financial reporting by Municipal Councils, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has a finance team that has been carrying out internal audits of the Municipal Councils, considering the audit issues highlighted by the OAG. All reports have been highlighted and compiled highlighting the issues at the Municipal Councils and the recommendations to rectify the issues. These audits by the Ministry of Local Government will enable the councils to resolve the issues surrounding financial reporting and governance, and internal control deficiencies.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is proposing to have a full complement of internal auditors that will be tasked to carry out timely audits of the council accounts. I am hopeful that with this team, the Ministry will be able to resolve almost all the deficiencies and audit findings by the OAG.

Moving forward, the Ministry is setting an internal audit and customer service unit that will undertake periodical and random audits of Municipal Councils for compliance with processes and procedures. This audit will also establish whether the councils are implementing the recommendations from OAG.

On the issue of the Ministry to consider employing a pool of qualified accountants who could assist small to medium-sized Municipal Councils, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier, Municipal Councils have recruited qualified accountants during its recruitments process. Furthermore, the

Ministry of Local Government intends to have a team of internal auditors that will assist the councils to perform the accounting functions better. Needless to say, the councils are facing financial constraints to recruit suitably qualified accountants by virtue of the Local Government Act of 1972. These councils could share human resources services of other financially stable councils. The legislation allows for shared services between two or more councils.

Formulation of strategic plans and all additional plans including risk management framework and plans for the councils to be given due consideration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Municipal Councils have developed their strategic plans and annual workplans that are aligned to the five-year, 20-year National Development Plan.

The councils are prompted to adhere to the strategic plans and annual workplans which certainly determines the efficiency of the councils.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- *Vinaka.*

HON. P.K. BALA.- *Vinaka, Maciu.*

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has been holding training for the CEOs, finance teams and HR teams of the Municipal Councils on the manuals. Mr. Speaker, Sir, consultations have been held with the Municipal Councils, Office of the Solicitor-General and the OAG on the relevant policies. This process was fundamental to have documents that could contribute towards good governance and efficiency in councils' services.

On the issue of the Local Government and the management of the Municipal Councils to ensure that the plans, policies, standards and guidelines are available to all staff and that all municipal staff are aware of them. Mr. Speaker, Sir, together with the development of the policies and guidelines, the Ministry of Local Government has developed a staff policy declaration that needs to be endorsed after officers of the councils have read and understood the various policies and guidelines. The CEOs of the Municipal Councils are mandated to ensure that officers sign the declaration for record purposes.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry conducts trainings and workshops for the officers of the councils on the governance and policy guidelines. The discussions at the training and workshops also evolve around the legislative provisions that are applicable to the operations of the Municipal Councils.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also working on new policies, standard operating procedures and guidelines in preparation for the election of new councillors and mayors. This will set the foundation for all Municipal Councils. In this regard, the Ministry will partner with development partners, such as the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, to develop training programmes for staff and councillors.

On the issue of maintaining accurate and complete fixed assets records which is vital to ensure the effectiveness of management of property, plant and equipment and accurate financial reporting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all Municipal Councils have fixed asset registers that are updated in a timely manner. The Councils acknowledge the importance of such registers for accurate financial reporting.

On the issue of the Councils to maintain accurate and updated records and information, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reiterate that Municipal Councils have strengthened their areas of record management through the implementation of a records register and have ensured that all accounting records are filed in a sequential order.

On the issue of the monitoring role of the Ministry of Local Government on the operations of Municipal Councils to be strengthened, as alluded to earlier, the Ministry of Local Government has been coordinating with teams of Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) towards strengthening financial accountability. Regular monitoring of the overall financial services is carried out. Special Administrators and all CEOs have specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure efficiency and accountability in the Municipal Elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, also allow me to respond to the general recommendations by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Firstly, on the recommendation for the Ministry of Local Government to strictly monitor the progress of capital projects implementation to provide better control for future grant disbursement to municipalities capital projects, the Ministry of Local Government has developed specific KPIs of the Special Administrators and CEOs to oversee the implementation of capital projects. In accordance with budgetary allocation timelines, Councils are also required to comply with the financial policy and grant agreements.

The Ministry of Local Government, in ensuring that Municipal Councils adhere to the grant agreement purposes, outlines and does thorough checking of grant expenditures incurred by the Councils. The Councils are also required to submit monthly signed financial reports to the Ministry.

In this financial year, the Ministry is establishing a capital project monitoring team to ensure better control over capital projects implementation. In addition, a capital project implementation policy will be developed to guide the Councils on the implementation phases of the development projects.

Furthermore, from the coming financial year, the Ministry will have an inhouse project management expert. This officer will assess and review all capital projects of Municipal Councils - those that are funded by Councils and the ones funded by Government.

On the Committee's recommendation for the Ministry to place priority in getting all municipalities audited accounts up to date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government, on a regular basis, monitors financial updates of Municipal Councils. It is worth noting that the Councils have been quite behind with their financial statements previously, however, the Ministry has collaborated with Councils to ensure that their accounts are updated and submitted to the Office of the Auditor-General in a timely manner.

The Councils were behind in the compilation of their financial statements for some years and the reason being, the requirement to upgrade their financial reporting to International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS). This has seen a major shift required in recording and reporting to which the Councils had to adjust. However, Municipal Councils have improved in the preparation of their financial accounts and working towards improving audit opinions, as well as recruiting officers with the right skills.

Majority of the Councils have updated their financial accounts and submitted a copy to the Office of the Auditor-General for auditing, thus leaving the Council with the recent updated financial accounts for 2022 is the paradise town of Fiji, the Savusavu Town Council.

On the issue of municipalities to include Special Administrators and CEOs in terms of engagement of contracts special criteria or KPIs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned earlier, the Ministry has specific KPIs for the Special Administrators where they are required to bring their audited accounts up to date. Teams of Special Administrators are tasked to set the KPIs for their respective CEOs.

On the issue of municipalities to explore with the Ministry the issue of a standard accounting software for uniformity purposes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government understands the need for a standard accounting software.

Nearly all the Councils have different accounting systems to manage their books so the Ministry is exploring a compatible software that will be suitable for all their Municipal Councils. Having a standard accounting software would mean that officers of the Councils are trained on the use of the software.

On the recommendation by the Committee that all Municipal Councils should use Government grants only for their intended purposes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for all grant funding, the Municipal Councils agreement clearly outlines the purpose on which the funding to the Councils should be utilised. Acquittals submitted to the Councils are thoroughly scrutinised by the Finance Team prior to releasing future grants. The Financial Manual build by the Ministry also provides proper guidance to the Councils as to how the Government grants need to be utilised.

The Ministry has further implemented the grant checklist that provides the grant funding requirements. The checklist has been circulated to all the Councils on the supporting documents to be attached to the payment vouchers and order for the supporting documents to ensure proper referencing. These are monitored by the Ministry of Local Government team through the checking of grant acquittals, ensuring that all proper supporting documents are attached to the payment vouchers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government has also implemented the financial policy. It also identifies and provides trainings to the Council staff on policies and proceeds to enhance the knowledge and skills for better service delivery.

On the issue of the municipalities to implement stringent disciplinary matters against staff who continue to disregard the due processes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we concede with the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The Ministry of Local Government has developed a Human Resource Policy that provides the disciplinary processes that need to be followed in such cases. The Council officers are, time and again, reminded on the due processes in their dealings. Municipal Councils are further guided by the Employment Relations Act 2007 and their collective agreement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to remind this Parliament that the Ministry of Local Government conducts audits of Municipal Councils' accounts, taking into consideration their financial issues. A matrix of serious issues is compiled by the Ministry and sent to Municipal Councils to address those issues and the Councils are required to ensure that there are no recurring matters.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reiterate that Municipal Councils agree with the importance of institutional reforms to ensure efficient service delivery - reforms in each institution and reforms in the operations of the Councils to further bring about transparency and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Councils are regularly prompted to ensure that accountability, transparency and good governance are always maintained in matters pertaining to the administration and operation and the work programme implementation of the Councils. Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the motion.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it looks like you have changed the order of the speakers who were named earlier on, but that is alright.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I speak on the Annual Report, I would like to pay tribute to a citizen of this country, or should I say, an extraordinary citizen of this country, who did much more for the rights of disabled persons in this country. Sir, I would like to acknowledge the late Joshko Wakaniyasi, for his tireless works in the fight for the rights of disabled persons in this country. Rest in peace, Josh.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have gone through this Report, and I have been told that most of the issues have been rectified. There are some matters that is before the Court and there are some matters that is before the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), which I do not want to touch on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would now like to make few opening remarks in relation to Municipal Councils. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts, in the Review of the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Audit Reports on Municipal Councils, was presented in Parliament as Parliamentary Paper No. 41 of 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has presented its findings on Municipal Councils on the issues that were raised and also as set in the relevant accepted legislative and legal procedures and requirements.

As such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will let the Report, its findings and outcomes stand on its own. However, I would like to make a few relevant comments on the role of the Office of the Auditor-General in relation to Municipal Councils operations and here, on my experience as the former Municipal Administrator with the Office of the Auditor-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was since shared among many Municipal Administrators at that point in time, on the delays in their work in auditing. This is not due to their reluctance, but in my experience, as I have said earlier on, because of the lack of staffing and especially, since the 1990s, the last turnover in their staff.

The Office of the Auditor-General, according to its legislative mandate is required under the 2013 Constitution now to inspect, audit and report to Parliament on all public accounts of the State. Understandably, this is a huge task but one of the results of their inability to spread their service in their work in regards to the Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during our time, there were delays from the Office of the Auditor-General as well. They were not auditing the Council books as requested by Municipal Councils. So, definitely, there will be backlog. We have been hearing about this backlog, but have we found out what were the reasons?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I bring this to the attention of Parliament because of the commentary on the lack of timely reporting of Municipal Councils on their accounts and activities. This is an important consideration, and I hope the Commission of Inquiry appointed in December 2022 and their findings will lead to a better position for the Office of the Auditor-General to provide timely, accurate and impartial reporting as we move forward.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It is cancelled.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Well, you can do anything you want, I am just trying to remind Parliament what was done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to extend my remarks on this matter in relation to the recent commentary by the honourable Minister of Finance in relation to funding of Municipal Councils. His assumption that such funding was not available, especially for smaller towns, Sir, I want to put it on record, once again, that the FijiFirst Government between 2014 and 2022 provided record levels of funding to all Councils in Fiji.

It is a known fact that the smaller Councils needed that type of support, and it appeared in the Budget book, year in and year out. Despite that, there was a comment made by the honourable Minister of Finance that now, they have to look for funds to assist the Councils as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these funding levels were designed to ensure that Councils were able to provide all services for ratepayers without resorting to an increase in rates and fees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this extended to rate waivers, as well as waivers of fees, such as for all stallholders in our Municipal markets. The larger capital spending is reflected in the record number of improvements and public amenities provided across Fiji. There is a comment made by the Auditor-General in the Report about the Rakiraki Municipal Market, that the tender was given to the same contractor who was supposed to construct the market. That is not the truth. That is why I am saying that I do not agree with all that has been said in the Report. Someone has to go and do the research.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The former Chairman behind you.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Now, it is you.

(Laughter)

The larger capital spending, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is reflected, as I have stated earlier on, in the record number of improvements and public amenities provided across Fiji. It includes large projects, such as the redevelopment of the Churchill Park into a sports complex that now holds international sports, this Albert Park in front of our Parliament complex, and many more.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The swimming pool?

HON. P.K. BALA.- The matter is before Court, once it is resolved, then you are supposed to do it because you are in Government now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the honourable Minister of Finance is such a great waiver of things, currently deciding on the waiver of over \$600 million of public funds in TELS that benefitted thousands of Fijians and was designed as a sustainable model for ongoing funding in an inclusive and a fair system for future students, I will request the honourable Minister to waive the town areas of all municipalities in this country. Not only that, but also the stall fees, Sir, so that the poor can be assisted.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are just seven days away from the 100 days, and I hope the Honourable Minister of Finance has ample seven days' time to decide on that so that the poor of this country can be assisted, which they have been preaching...

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- You had 16 years.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know where the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources comes from every time. We had 16 years, of course, we had eight not 16, I will correct you on that. But the waiver of stall fees is all there by FijiFirst. What else do you want to know?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Please, go and do some research. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated that I will be very brief, I just want to say that it is not that simple to run Municipal Councils. Take my word!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- They should have elections.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Whether you have elections or not, it does not matter because during election time, even the Councils get dissolved, honourable Tabuya. You do not know. Go and do some research, please. I am telling you. Ask your colleague next to you.

(Laughter)

Councils were dissolved, I am telling you, but that is another matter for another day on the election.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason why I am saying that it is not that simple because the Municipal Councils, the Administrators and staff, meet all sorts of people everyday in and out, they have to deal with all sorts of problems and for people to come and present this type of reports is not fair on the staff of Municipal Councils. Today, I want to take this opportunity to thank all...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Tell your Chair.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Carry on.

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... those hardworking staff of municipalities throughout the country.

They can come up with reports, but we are here to defend them.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Stupid.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, as I have started with by saying, “seven days away from 100 days”, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a short contribution on the motion before Parliament. As a former Member of the Public Accounts Committee, I would like to state and would like to thank the honourable Minister for taking a step forward in making commitment to the recommendation that has been made by the Public Accounts Committee.

It is a first for such a Minister to be making a recommendation, to be stating proactive actions that relates to issues that have been highlighted, discussed and placed in the report of the Public Accounts Committee of which you, Mr. Speaker, was also a Member at one time. I see that two Members of the Opposition who were Members of the Public Accounts Committee, and they were part of this report, would fully agree that the discrepancies that were noted during the discussions of the Public Accounts Committee reflects to the lack of support that was given by the previous Ministers for Local Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I thank the current Minister, who has even stated that this cause of actions by stating that his Ministry has prepared a matrix to address the discrepancies that has been noted in the Report, and I thank him for that, Mr. Speaker.

Sir, just on the short commentaries on the issues that have been raised from the other side regarding the backlog, it is unfortunate that the former Minister continues to blame the Office of the Auditor-General.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Your record?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It has been corrected.

We have always highlighted that the responsibility of the Auditor-General is not to prepare the accounts of municipalities, it is the personnel that have been hired - from the Chief Executive Officer to the Finance Manager and every other officer within the municipalities who are responsible for the preparation of the accounts.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Auditor-General has been blamed and the Auditor-General, as you would have been aware that in some of the discussions, they have been put under unnecessary pressure ...

(Hon. P.K. Bala interjects)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ... because the accounts that have been submitted to their officers for auditing are not according to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). That is why they have always been sent back to municipalities to prepare. They are trying to tell the municipalities to prepare financial statements fully in compliance with the IFRS.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the record, the decision for municipalities to adopt IFRS is not something that was discussed at the municipal level, I think the former Minister would also agree to it, that this has also placed unnecessary costs ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- Don't force me, Minister.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ... to the municipalities to try and adopt to the changes at their own cost. This has also led to the delay because of the policies that were implemented at that time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I commend the current Minister for the work he has done in terms of trying to address the anomalies that have been highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the issues regarding the performance of CEOs as has been recommended, their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the submission of up-to-date financial statements, and not only that, the intention was to ensure that the Annual Report of the Municipalities be submitted on time as part of the KPIs for the CEOs and staff.

We thank the honourable Minister for adhering to institutional reform and re-organisation structure that has been alluded to, to ensure that the operations of the municipalities are brought up to par and up to standard, so that they can confirm to the Coalition Government's intentions and objectives of accountability, Mr. Speaker. Sir. Thank you.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion that is before Parliament and I would like to thank other speakers who have spoken on this motion. I would also like to thank the Public Accounts Committee Members for their thorough work in capturing the list of issues arising from the Municipal Council Report that turn into recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have noted that there are eight recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee. Some of these recommendations have been implemented, considering the Annual Reports are rather old. One has to read the Verbatim Report to understand the progress made on the recommendation which is attached as Appendix.

Unfortunately, the honourable Minister for Education lied by giving credit to the new Minister. In fact, if you read the Verbatim Report prepared in 2022, it talks about all the work that was done prior. So, at least, the honourable Minister for Local Government acknowledged the work that was done.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Unfortunately, the honourable Minister for Education is in the habit of lying, so he tried to lie in this Parliament but he is caught out. One has to read the verbatim report, you will see it all.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Very bad, honourable Minister.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the former Minister for Local Government, I can assure Parliament that these recommendations are taken very seriously by Municipal Council and the Ministry of Local Government. They take genuine steps to rectify these issues so that these matters are not raised again.

However, as we have also heard from the honourable Minister for Local Government, size do matter. Large municipalities can afford to have qualified people to provide that level of assistance, but then they are very small municipalities with barely 200 ratepayers, and with 200 ratepayers, with no other source of income, it becomes extremely hard for them to have qualified people to assist them. So, in that case, we had introduced shared services which the honourable Minister has spoken on, where HR services, financial services and project management services can be used by smaller municipalities by just talking to the larger municipalities. So shared services are already in the plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to highlight that the staff of the Ministry of Local Government and the Permanent Secretary have worked extremely hard to come up with Financial Manual, HR Manual and SOPs just to help Municipal Councils, because they did not have the skills, and a lot of trainings went into it. For example, CEOs Forum is being held regularly where all CEOs come together and discuss the good things they have done, the difficulties they are facing, the challenges they can see ahead of them and how they can collectively handle the situation. Again, trainings are also provided by CIU to the Project Implementation Unit within the municipalities so that they can learn how projects can be managed and reported, et cetera. So, they have been doing all these.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to mention that, yes, there has been a backlog of financial statements as well as annual reports, but now the Ministry of Local Government has set in place the monitoring system. They have even created a data book, I do not know whether the honourable Minister has seen that or not. We have created a data book just to see how different fees and charges are being charged by different municipalities, so you can track at the same time.

Along with that monitoring system that we had introduced, they also monitor annual reports and financials. So, the monitoring team on a regular basis communicate with the Special Administrators and CEOs asking them to submit those reports. Even the team at the Ministry of Local Government go out to municipalities assisting them in financial aspects of things when they are stuck. I recall the Ministry of Local Government also prepared Charts of Account for consistency so that reporting can be consistent. All these work has taken place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for uniformity in the preparation of financial statements across 13 Municipal Councils, the councils were recommended to use Zero Accounting Software and the trainings were also provided to the financial management team in each municipality. A lot of work has gone into municipalities. Cases related to mismanagement of funds or abuse of office were reported to FICAC for investigation. Also, independent investigations were carried out on matters highlighted by the Auditor-General's Report in the case of the Rakiraki Municipal Market. So, all that have taken place.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Local Government has put in a lot of governance structure, starting from the Special Administrators, right down to the teams that deliver. This is being done to ensure that accountability, transparency and ratepayers' money and the money that is given by the Government is used appropriately.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff of Ministry of Local Government, CEOs and Special Administrators for the work they had done over a period of time, and I will encourage them to give their full support to the new honourable Minister who will take it to the next level, so I look forward to that.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on the motion that was raised by honourable Koroilavesau, I think when he was speaking, he did not mean to say that Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee should be from the Opposition side, he simply meant was that the chairmanship could be any Member from the Government side, not the honourable Minister for Finance; that is all.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Assistant Minister for the Report and also thank all the honourable Members who have spoken before me. It would not be too off the rail if I start by saying that the management of the towns and city councils in the last 15 to 16 years has resulted in another mess that we are dealing with as a new Government, amongst the many that they have left us to deal with.

Obviously, there are a number of things that we have to deal with. One is the rate arrears. Rate and rental collection, I understand is a historical issue, but I think over the last so many years,

and also exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rental arrears is huge now. It is almost \$62.2 million including, if you add interest portion of \$2.4 million as at December 2022, and majority of the default ratepayers are residential owners. These are people who could afford to pay. The capacity of the Municipal Councils to deliver on their mandated roles and responsibilities has become a major concern due to the current financial state of the city and town councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I may not also be off the mark to say that the Municipal Councils over the years have not managed their funds well, nor have they implemented successful rate collection and strategies. That is very clear from the arrears that we see. What the new Government is obviously looking at and the honourable Minister alluded to that is that we will be putting in strategies and controls so that there is sustainability in terms of the financial situation of local Municipal Councils.

It is kind of hilarious listening to the two former Ministers. A bit of sensible contribution that came from the other side was from honourable Maharaj, and he rightfully talked about the legacy of annual reports. No matter how much they justify, when they were in government, they had one of the worst records of getting annual reports on time and the backlog was just huge. This is one of the reasons precisely that we are dealing with their mess and backlog in PAC and we have to deal with it for maybe another few years, before we come to deal with this.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they talked about and it is very important, this Government led by the honourable Prime Minister has already made that decision that we are going to restore elected councils. All the justification, Sir, after the 2006 *coup* and I know honourable Bala was saying he was eight years but actually he was there for 16 years. He continued as an Administrator appointed by the Military Government. So, he was there for 16 years running.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I was not in Government for 16 years. I want to make it very clear, and I want this to be on record that I was in government for the last eight years; as simple as that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Quote the Standing Order, honourable Member.

HON. P.K. BALA.- A point of clarification, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- What I am asking is, you quote the Standing Order. What Standing Order have you....

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a clarification that I am putting, like what used to happen in Parliament.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, all I was saying that he was involved in the management of Municipal Councils for the last 16 years.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Where is the proof?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last municipal election was held, as you know, in 2005 and for 16 years one of the reasons why we have had such problems from the financial side and the management of councils was direct interference by those who were in government for the last 16 years. I do not blame the workers; I blame those who were running the affairs of town and city councils. I remember, and he needs to be reminded and you will recall as well, Sir, in 2014

when he became Minister, I think he was sitting somewhere there as Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- And you were sitting there.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He promised the whole country that he was going to hold local government elections then he continued with the review for four years and then comes another Minister who also said we are reviewing the Act. So, for eight years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they reviewed the Act because they never had the intension of holding an election because they were enjoying the interference, enjoying appointing Administrators, enjoying CEOs, politicising and there were many examples of corrupt practices and nepotism that occurred in that system.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So many lies.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They need to reflect in this a little bit, now that they are sitting in the Opposition and I see and hear the honourable Member who got sworn in today still bragging about it the fact is that they are sitting in Opposition. They should reflect on some of the actions that they took when they were in government and that relates to the town and city councils.

(Laughter)

The heavy reliance on Government funding, basically what has happened is because they were interfering, because they wanted to control everything, because they wanted to please everyone and because they wanted to win the two elections they went on a rampage and made sure...

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order!

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Standing Order 60(1) and that reads, “When speaking, members must confine their observations to the subject under consideration.” Please, ask the honourable Member to confine himself to the subject matter in consideration. Stop making comparisons about before, get on with the job, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all we are asking.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is hilarious coming from the honourable Member. I am still talking about the Municipal Council elections because we are looking at the Report which was done as part of what they did before and we are talking about elections and I am also responding to what they have been saying.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are not talking about the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about the delay in getting the Annual Reports and Financial Statements, again they are blaming the Office of the Auditor-General.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- When they were in government, they did everything, let alone the Office of the Auditor-General. They tried to interfere in every independent institution, and he has

the audacity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to come again and blame OAG.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Just like what you are doing now

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They attacked the Auditor-General in Parliament, they attacked the OAG and they appointed a Commission of Inquiry in November 2021.

HON. P.K. BALA.- For his own good.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Relevance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- One year, they did not produce a report, so stop talking about the Auditor-General's Office.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, Mr. Speaker, Sir,

HON. P.K. BALA.- Hey, not to me!

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is coming from Members who were in Government. They attacked and they were all sitting here like ducks and cheering the man....

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order!

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in your own words a little bit of leeway every now and then is fine, but I have raised it and I will raise it again. In accordance with the Standing Orders, please ask the honourable Member to stay relevant. Absolutely as irrelevant as irrelevant can be.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honestly I cannot understand what the Point of Order was for. I am talking about the municipal council elections, I am talking about the Auditor-General's Report and the honourable Member talked about it. I am responding to him. I do not know what he is talking about.

(Laughter)

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me also respond to honourable Bala. He said that he wants to thank all the hardworking staff of the town and city council but let me just remind him, from 2016, the workers in the Suva City Council did not manage to negotiate anything, nor any pay rise or any of the conditions that was deteriorating.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under this Government the unions are now having a good negotiation led by, he knows who, Mr. Attar Singh....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Tell them!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- So you will give them a pay rise?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is a Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which has decided that the unions, the employers and government will work together to ensure that the workers in this country receive justice and we are reversing all the injustices that was done under their government; we are doing that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We have also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, announced that the retirement age of the municipal workers, once the appropriate legislation is put in place, will be done.

The final point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and again they are responsible. You look at some of the capital projects and honourable Bala and honourable Kumar knows. Either you talk about Lautoka Swimming Pool, whether you talk about Ba Stadium, whether you talk about the completion of Govind Park, whether you talk about markets, it is all blocked and locked by them. We, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have landed with the responsibility of clearing that mess and, Sir, I will let them laugh a little bit.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he knows. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know why the honourable Member is getting agitated, because he knows what happened.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What happened?

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- And he was involved in it. He has a lot to explain, and we will come to that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes, come.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I know why the honourable Member is getting agitated because he knows what happened.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What happened?

HON. K.K. LAL.- \$5 lamb chops.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He was involved in it and he, Mr. Speaker, has a lot to explain.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I am going to.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He has a lot to explain and we will come to that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes, come. Most welcome. I am here to face you.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, the important thing for us to understand out of this Report and the legacy that they left us is that we need to streamline all the processes – the financial processes ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- No money.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... funding to the town and city councils and only when we are able to do that properly, Mr. Speaker, we will bring the services back, that the people, the ratepayers need in this country in the town and city councils.

We have been talking about ease of doing business, Mr. Speaker, and one of the biggest bottlenecks is the efficiency within the Municipal Councils, apart from many others. So again, Mr. Speaker, that is another mess that we have to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, going forward as the honourable Minister pointed out very clearly that the Government has announced that we will hold municipal elections and the honourable Minister also pointed out that the work is being done to review the appropriate laws, the appropriate processes and procedures and once that is in place and that is the commitment that the Government has made and that will happen. I want to tell the people of this country, all the ratepayers, all those people living towns and cities that as soon as the Government is ready, they will have an opportunity ...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Waive the rates!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... to hold the elections. We are going to give back elected councils to the people of this country and that is when we expect accountability and responsibility to return and services in the way that people deserve in towns and city councils will be restored. Once again, I want to thank the Chairman and honourable Members of the Committee for the Report before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for lunch and we will continue with the debate and the right of reply when we resume, and that is when the bell is sounded. Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.31 p.m.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I wish to advise the Opposition not to worry so much about the chairing of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), even though I am in the Ministry of Finance. In fact, it should be better, as I will not only chair a Parliamentary Committee which looks after checks and balances, but also ensure that finance responsibility and accountability processes and systems across all Ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, is improved as the Ministry of Finance is the one that will consolidate all the Ministries' financial affairs, accounts and even budget at the end of the day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were a lot of issues that were raised today and I wish to thank the current Minister for Local Government for being proactive with his reply, even though the reports were two to three years old and were under two different Ministers before him. But one thing is certain, Sir, we all agree that there is a need for a major improvement at all Municipal Councils and at Ministry level, and how they keep, operate and report their financial affairs, and also how they keep their books.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all honourable Members who have contributed to the debate and am looking forward to those Municipal Councils to improve their overall performance and, most importantly, in the implementation of the recommendations by the OAG and the Committee.

There are few outstanding issues that were raised - Some are in the courts and some with FICAC and they will be looked into deeply by the Committee in the next report to Parliament.

With those final comments, on my right of reply, I wish to thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE ACCIDENT COMPENSATION COMMISSION FIJI 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the 2018 Annual Report of the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji which was tabled on 29th August, 2022.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Members of this august Parliament, I rise to speak on the Review Report of the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF) 2018 Annual Report which was tabled on 29th August, 2022.

The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Report, as I have said earlier, in 2022. The Report was tabled by the former Chairperson of the Committee, honourable Vijay Nath.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report discussed the no fault compensation scheme which was introduced by the previous Government through the Accident Compensation Act 2017 to address the

various challenges and delays that were formerly faced by individuals who are involved in motor vehicle accidents.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commended the ACCF for the services that they have provided in particular, the no fault basis of the compensation paid to families of accident victims for the period under review and, of course, Sir, most of the families have substantially benefitted from the funds that were provided through ACCF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee at that time was made aware that ACCF has to collaborate with key organisations, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Employment, Ministry of Education, Land Transport Authority (LTA), the Fiji Police Force and the Legal Aid Commission, to deliver their services efficiently and, of course, we commend such collaborations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, it was noted during the submission that majority of the motor vehicle accidents were due to careless and dangerous driving. It is urged that all drivers use caution and be mindful of the various risks careless drivers pose, not only to themselves, but to other road users also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on a personal note, while I noted that the Government is paying a substantial amount of money into paying, where the families of those who have lost loved ones during motor vehicle accidents, I noted that there is a lack of emphasis on national road safety, particularly the initiatives to empower people so that they are aware of road safety and this was supposed to be one of the responsibilities of LTA.

But I have noted, Sir, that this has not been vigorously enforced by this agency and, of course, we might be looking into trying to strengthen road safety laws and also ensuring that the public are aware of their roles and their responsibilities and particularly, the need to educate, enforce more education and awareness amongst our school children in schools, particularly primary schools so that they are aware of what they need to do when they are on the road, know their responsibilities when on the roads and also on motor vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the former Members of the Committee – honourable Vijay Nath, honourable Veena Bhatnagar, honourable Sachida Nand, honourable Inosi Kuridrani and honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, who were part of this team, and they produced this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers before me sent by the honourable Whips, and the order of speakers are as follows:

- (1) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
- (2) Honourable N.T. Tuinaceva;
- (3) Honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport;
- (4) Honourable P.D. Kumar; and
- (5) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for some time, we will continue to be debating Committee Reports that are brought to us by Committees that we have selected and Members of this august Parliament, reviewing matters that were administered before we were elected. So, we will be drawn into a debate on the pros and cons of the Report, as well as how they reflect the activities of

those that were involved in the various bodies that are reported on in the Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report presented to us today is on the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF) 2018 Annual Report that comes under the ambit and portfolio administered by the Prime Minister. It is a very straightforward function, but we have had some discussions and debates on the functioning of this area of our administration. Before the honourable Mover moved this motion, I had asked that I share the time allocated to Government with the Minister of Finance, and I was talking to him when you called out my name.

We had to go into a Compensation Commission arrangement under the previous Government. Before that, there were other areas that accidents were covered in, third party insurance, et cetera, and the honourable Member who was responsible for Land Transport Authority (LTA) is fully aware of the reason why, at that time.

There were some very disappointed insurance companies that were involved up to that time and this is an ongoing discussion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether we should really bring it into this as under the purview of Government or we should allow the private sector to continue. The pros and cons from the Government point of view, financial point of view and economic point of view, I will let the honourable Minister of Economy, or in our case we call him the Minister of Finance, to deal with that, as well as the concerns from our Minister responsible for LTA.

But I would like to say that the Report of the Committee is very detailed, and I would like to commend the honourable Members of Committee, who are mostly sitting on the other side – those with the leadership of that Committee, in the thorough work that they had done to bring the Report for our consideration this time.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the other contributors from the Government side who will go into the details of the observations of the Committee on ACCF.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion. The introduction of the Accident Compensation Act 2017 and Regulations brought about the most significant transformation in the history of Fiji in terms of this accident compensation, as mentioned by the honourable Prime Minister, from that process and what used to be the practice many, many years ago, and the change that came under this transformation through the Accident Compensation Act 2017.

Our accident compensation history has not been a good one. If most honourable Members can recall stories behind some of the events of the past - what people have been waiting for, for longer years to try and just get through the process of obtaining proper compensation.

When we go back to the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the findings, it says that the Committee commends the ACCF for the service they provided, in particular with the no fault basis - the compensation paid to families of accident victims for the period under review. It is much easier and faster for victims now and families of victims to receive compensation without protracted legal battles.

On the other finding that was also mentioned in the Report, it says that ACCF is to continue working with various media outlets and stakeholders to promote, educate and raise awareness about the services provided, especially the importance of paying the levy in relation to compensation.

Mr. Speaker, ACCF continues to receive positive feedback from satisfied applicants. The feedback consistently referred to expression of gratitude and appreciation for the teams' customer

service, timeliness, empathy and the professionalism and simplicity of the process.

Once compensation is available under the no fault scheme, there are certain exclusions which apply to such areas such as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and refusing to permit a breath test which is something that is called by the law enforcement to conduct when checking on those involved in accidents; withholding of proper driving licence and failure to comply with all the conditions of the driving licence, be convicted for causing the accident and also failing to pay the motor vehicle accident levy, the motor vehicle accident levy, amongst others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, approximately 80 percent of the \$44 million has already been paid out would have not been paid if the application for the compensation were made prior to the introduction of the Accident Compensation Scheme. We can see that this is a big thing for Fiji.

Fiji now, under this Scheme, is operating just like the way they are doing in New Zealand or Australia in terms of our benchmark. Family members no longer have to establish the fault or pursue the costly and protracted legal claims for compensation. So, the Scheme also removes a number of unreasonable exclusions that existed under the old law.

It is far much more easier now to receive compensation for motor vehicle, employment and school accidents of which there is no application fee to be paid. So the ACCF collaborates with key stakeholders to ensure that victims and families of victims receive the best service to obtain compensation under the No-Fault Scheme. A proactive approach that is taken with the view to prevent serious injuries and deaths on our roads, workplaces and school.

The ACCF has undertaken a number of roadside campaigns as well, and I know that that has been done, as alluded by the Chairman of the Committee, on the importance of carrying out the education and also awareness for members of the public on how this ACCF system works, and also for members of the public in taking precautions in regards to the safety which covers the members of the general public whether you are a driver or a passenger in a driven motor vehicle. Now, the team delivered numerous presentations to the stakeholders and also to the members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the continuous improvement and the implementation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) has assisted ACCF to successfully carry out its operation during restrictions placed to manage COVID-19 during that period, so the development of ACCF Team empowered them to serve the public effectively and efficiently, despite lockdown challenges, and the Team managed to process a significant number of applications. The Team takes supportive approach with applicants, and this is evident from the positive customer feedback. So, there is a great focus, Sir, on customer service and the need to remain respectful and to give compensation claim to applicants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by the ACCF, extensive awareness campaigns have been undertaken through the use of various medium, such as billboards, LED screens, the media releases and the social media postings to ensure the Scheme is visible and the public are aware of their right to apply for compensation. So, the compensation paid to applicants provided relief and assisted them at a time when they needed it most, which would not have been possible without the No Fault Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2021-2022 Budget, there was an announcement of the complete exemption of the Annual Motor Vehicle Accident Levy for the period commencing on and from 1st August, 2021 to 31st August, 2022. This was in recognition of the severe impacts of COVID-19 on Fiji's economy and on the families of Fiji.

The announcement provided relief to motor vehicle owners for a period of one year, as the nation coped with significant impacts of COVID-19. So, the owner of a motor vehicle in that assistance was upon the registration or renewal of registration of motor vehicle with LTA were exempted from paying the Annual Motor Vehicle Accident levy.

A total of \$44.8 million in compensation has been paid under that No Fault Scheme since 1st January, 2018, of which \$30.3 million was for motor vehicle accidents, \$13.5 million for employment accidents and \$500,000 for school accidents.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking on this motion, again, I would like to say that the importance of this new Scheme and this system continues operating in our beloved country to assist people, especially those accident members of families and those victims in getting compensation in the areas of accidents whether it is motor vehicle accidents, workplace accidents or even school accidents.

MR. SPEAKER.- That was a well articulated input from our former boss of LTA.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion at hand on accident compensation. With regard to the Report itself, we had looked at this Report as a Committee last year and there were some issues in terms of the period covered and if you look at page 13, it is as at 30th June, 2020, but the Report is 2018.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We have now resolved it.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I am not here to argue with you, just to assist with the debate today.

If you look at the figures there, the Motor Vehicle Accident Compensation is \$10.9 million, Employment Accidents is \$1.4 million, School Accidents is \$55,500. Motor vehicle accidents make up the highest number or percentage of compensation and this is an area, as mentioned by the Chairman, that we, as a nation, need to look at. We normally tell our children, “Take care” or “come back home soon”, and those are some of the messages which we tell them in terms of road safety.

There is a rise in the number of vehicle accidents and fatalities. If we go by the number of road fatalities in the last five years – 17 in 2018, 63 in 2019, 45 in 2020, 25 in 2021, 44 in 2022 and 18 so far, which we have not even reached the end of March. With that rate, we might even be the same as 2018, or even surpass that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of those fatalities, the majority have been due to speeding which is around 42 percent and drunk driving is 29 fatalities which is around 10 percent. So, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) has taken proactive measures in terms of awareness and defensive driving as part of its functions.

Just some of the figures to share with you - 225 school visits regarding road safety, 143 awareness activities, 1,058 defensive driving trainings in 2018 and this increased to 768 school visits in 2019, 700 awareness activities and 861 defensive driving. Again, in 2020, this number is about the same in 2021 and 2022. So, this is an activity which LTA as an entity under my Ministry will be intensifying in the next few years given the concerns (if you look at those figures) such as motor vehicle accidents.

Traffic Infringement Notices have also been issued, 2018 to 2022 a total of 528,960 (quite a huge number). We need to reduce this, and I commend the efforts of the law enforcement officers in terms of the duties they are undertaking proactively and reactively through the use of technology

innovation and strict enforcement. I implore members of the public to please adhere to road rules in terms of discipline in driving. We need to think of our children and ask whether the 10 minutes safe through speeding is worth the possibility of endangering lives.

The Land Transport Authority is quite a complex organisation, there are various levels of legislation and regulations. Some are cumbersome, some are inconsistent; that is an exercise we are going through right now in terms of the review of the organisation, the legislation and regulation to ensure some of the impediments in terms of our transport industry is removed and made more efficient and effective.

MR. SPEAKER.- There is a slight change, the honourable Usamate's name has been put forward by the Whip and after that it will be the honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to talk to this motion. I think on this side of Parliament we totally endorse the recommendations to take note of the Report. I thought it will be important just to point out a number of things.

The very fact that we have this organisation in place is a reflection of a phenomenal change in this country. It is a huge change. I have had the honour and the privilege of having served as the Minister for Employment (I think two times now) and we have seen the pain and the heartache that comes when people have injuries to the only person working in their family trying to get that compensation from Government.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- For people who have served as Ministers for Employment, we know how heartbreaking it is, the difficulty of getting that compensation and the fact that we have got this coming in with no blame, it is a huge change. I have seen over the years when you have the statute of limitations. The statute of limitations (if I am not mistaken), if you are not able to claim the money within seven years, it is gone. So even though you might be right that the injury did take place and there is argument of who is to blame, that money is gone. This has been a huge a change and I think this is indicative of some of the things that the former Government was doing, trying to do things better for the people of this country.

One big change that I will never forget, in the past, if you are a member of the security forces, the military forces and you got injured in Lebanon or wherever, you never got workmen's compensation.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- You did not get it. It was under the Prime Minister Bainimarama that that finally happened. So that if you are in the security force, you got the worker's compensation, but then you had this whole thing about who is to blame?

This particular legislation that brought about the Accident Compensation took that away. It just says, "if something happens to you, you get the compensation." I think that was the phenomenal change in this country. For people who have been waiting for a long time for something like that to happen, you all have family members that have been able to get the benefits out of this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only that, school accidents, the importance of children. Children can be playing at a school and someone pokes eye with a pencil and their sight has gone. That means their whole future can be hampered, can be damaged by school yard accidents, et cetera. This particular

compensation, this particular organisation now makes sure that that compensation is there. I think it drives home for us the importance of children, the importance of looking after our children and making sure that we put in place laws and regulations that look after them to make sure that they can have a better future.

One of the most important things that I believe and all of us talk about this, justice delayed is justice denied. Sometimes when you have someone who is the only breadwinner and the compensation does not come quickly to that family, they can then begin this downward spiral into poverty, et cetera. It is very important that, that money or compensation, it is not going to completely take away the pain of losing someone or the injury that accrued to the breadwinner in that particular family, but this allows for the speed of that compensation. It allows us to be able to do things for the family to make sure that they continue to survive, that they can get through the hard times, especially for some families, if the breadwinner does not have a lot of FNPF then they rely of these funds. If there is a blame game that is going on between the insurance company and the employer then it just leads to this delayed justice which leads to all kinds of problems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just looking at this one, this has been a phenomenal change in this country. Phenomenal for families in which these things have occurred, the no fault and I think if you look back at the history of the FijiFirst Government when it was in place, it also brought about for the first time, the first National Minimum Wage. Once again trying to protect the interest of workers that are at the very bottom rungs in terms of earning income.

We have had the nine years of economic growth, low taxation rates, taxation thresholds were brought up to \$30,000. I am just trying to point out some of the things that we did, it is all encompassing, you going to look at it holistically, all of these things working out well.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the former Minister for Transport (sitting behind me), he was one of the chiefs architects of this, trying to put through to make sure that we have the compensation out.

The last thing that I was saying, very important now for us, I think the honourable Minister for Transport (my good friend there) has talked about the importance of road safety. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the statistics for this year has not been good in terms of people getting injured and hurt.

I know that we had a decade target of halving, if I am not mistaken, the number of fatalities that we have on our roads, we have more vehicles, more heavier vehicles, we have speed limits that sometimes a lot of government drivers do not abide by those speed limits of 50 kilometres per hour or 60 kilometres per hour, but I think this is a great challenge for us to make sure that we reduce fatalities and accidents on our roads.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving the opportunity to speak on the motion. Sir, ACCF is a statutory body established in 2018, so this Report that we are discussing today is the first report from ACCF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ACCF is one of the legacies of the FijiFirst Government which benefited many families and ended the unfair Accident Compensation Scheme that existed previously and what we know as Third Party Insurance. People were denied justice under the old system and as alluded to by honourable Usamate, one had to look for fault, you had to prove the fault before compensation can be given out.

Many accident victims were running from pillar to post trying to get that compensation and I recall the campaign the Consumer Council of Fiji started just because of the complaints they were receiving from the victims who were not compensated under the Third Party Insurance. Third Party Insurance, while it is compulsory, it is mandatory.

If you own a vehicle, before you put that vehicle on the road, you must pay this compulsory insurance. Unfortunately, with this insurance came a number of exclusion clauses that denied the compensation. One of the exclusion clauses, it is hard to believe that it existed just few years ago. If a driver is drunk or did not carry a valid licence and if you are walking down the street and this vehicle hits you, you will not be compensated. You have no link to the driver, you do not know when you are walking on the street whether the driver is drunk or is under the influence of drugs or he or she is not carrying a driving licence, and that is when the bigger battle started because, firstly, the victim had to fork out money for medical treatment; secondly, the victim had to fork out money to pay for the lawyers, and obviously the third one is wasting your time just going to the court to prove the point. So, it was during that time that the Council decided that there has to be some form of change in the policy so that victims are taken care of. So with ACCF, as the honourable Prime Minister mentioned, the Government received lots of criticisms from those who were directly linked to the insurance sector. But today, we can see the benefits of reforming accident compensation laws and the funding model which is sustainable.

With the Accident Compensation Act and the establishment of ACCF, the accident victims now have a simple redressal mechanism. It is not adversarial, it is a very efficient system. You simply go to ACCF, fill in your form, log your claims and then it also talks about the compensation in three parts. For example, if there is a death, the family is compensated \$75,000 immediately, and if it is a total injury where the permanent injury is such where he or she is not able to work and look after themselves then the compensation is around \$150,000. So it is a very clear system, it is such that if you do not wish to take that compensation and if you feel that loss of a life is not worth \$75,000, you are free to take the matter to court, and then you can take up your case. Another good component of this Accident Compensation Act is particularly on exclusion. Exclusion is there, but it is penalising the offender, which is the driver, if the driver is drunk or is not carrying a valid licence, whatever the reason is, they will not be given compensation, but the victim will.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2018, ACCF has grown into a trusted organisation that not only deals with road accidents, as we heard that it also deals with employment related accidents or school accidents. I would like to comment on Recommendations 4 and 5.

Recommendation 4 suggests the inclusion of sports injuries and what I am saying, this can be tricky and a costly affair. The ACCF needs to undertake a thorough research to set the boundary for sports injury and to understand the total cost of compensation and how it will be funded. Currently, as I said, the model is such that it is sustainable and works within.

Unless and until ACCF is able to reduce the injuries or accidents whether at school, employment or road, that is where the savings can be seen. But at the rate the compensation is being paid out, I hope we do not see the day where there is not enough money to compensate. So, that is something the ACCF needs to work hand in hand with road safety, schools, and I know they have been doing it. They have been running many awareness campaigns with various organisations and they should continue doing that.

Recommendation 5, which honourable Tuisawau has just talked about in detail, is how do we create a financial surplus and not create a system where there is financial constraint for ACCF to do the payment, and it all boils down to the point that we need to reduce the accidents. We can only do that if we make the rules very clear, if the rules are enforced by the road authority, LTA or the rules

are enforced by the schools or the rules are enforced at a workplace then only we can see reduction in the number of incidents or accidents.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we often hear, just a while ago in the morning session, honourable Prasad talked about Government's legacy, so this is our legacy that we leave behind and we look forward to seeing how you are going to take this institution to another level.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the past and present staff of Consumer Council of Fiji. It was their success and hard work that saw this particular legislation come into force and the establishment of ACCF. I also would like to thank the staff of ACCF for the good job they have been doing so far, and I wish them best of luck in ensuring that they are able to reduce the number of accidents. I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very briefly as has been stated, the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji was established in 2017 and since then honourable Tuinaceva gave some interesting statistics which I also have. I think he has got the latest statistics, which is good. The Opposition is able to get the information, unlike, when we were in Opposition, it was very difficult to get information from any of the statutory organisations.

MR. SPEAKER.- He is a former boss.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is true that the turnaround time for payments under this scheme is much faster, because it is a No Fault Scheme, which means victims do not have to prove fault or negligence. So, it does make it more efficient.

The point that I want to make, and I think honourable Premila Kumar actually hit the nail on the head, and that is the most important thing that I wanted to say and it is true that while some of the things that the previous Government did, they brought in some changes to the legislation, some we supported as the Opposition in Parliament, and I hope they will remember that. We used to point out often from the Opposition that the information they were providing was always like a bit hard, not every detail was being given. So, I want to just point some of those out, because it is important, and as I said, the honourable Premila Kumar made a very important point about the sustainability of these kinds of schemes.

They talked about New Zealand, New Zealand was actually having a lot of difficulties about the sustainability, I am not sure what the situation is at the moment but that is what I was told. So, it is very important for us to put in place, I think the first thing that honourable Members talked about is how to reduce the motor vehicle accidents. As of today, \$29 million was just paid for accident compensation and as being pointed out about \$11.5 million for employment accidents and about a million dollars for school accidents. So, the effort of the organisation will have to focus on reducing the motor vehicle accidents.

The other point that no one from the other side pointed out is how this scheme is funded. As I have said, honourable Premila Kumar is now here, I said she made a very good point and a very important one about the sustainability of this scheme because right now. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is funded from what we call the Accident Compensation Levy. I know the rate has been reduced by 50 percent as part of the COVID-19 support, so with a 100 percent of that Accident Compensation Levy...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Vehicle levy.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Vehicle levy.

With 100 percent, if we go back to 100 percent, we would collect only \$12 million and the FNU Levy will give us about \$8 million which is the total inflow of income for the ACCF.

Now, the other point that we need to point out and this has already been raised by employers because there was no discussion with the employers about the training levy. The total inflow is based on the motor vehicle accident levy and the 40 percent of the 1 percent of FNU levy. So, out of the 100 percent of the FNU Levy, 40 percent goes to the ACCF, 50 percent goes to private GP outsourcing and 10 percent goes to training.

I think honourable Premila Kumar was correct that if the trend for motor vehicle accident compensation continues and we continue to use the FNU training levy, which again is another debate because over the years and if you look at some of the difficulties that we are having today with respect to the shortage of skills in that category where the former FNTC was providing those skills, it is not there. If we are not careful, if the government does not get into action very quickly and we will Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of our strategy to ensure that we continue to provide the skills, we are going to have to think very carefully how to address that.

This information is very important, and I am sure the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations is already getting feedbacks from the employers as to what needs to be done. So, the question that I want to put and I think this is the work that the ACCF will have to do is to look at the financial model because if we remove the 40 percent of the 1 percent FNU levy because we want to train more people, we want employers to use that to get training then out of the \$20 million that goes to the ACCF, \$12 million will be taken away. If you take the \$12 million away, it is not going to be sustainable with the rate of payout that we are experiencing. This is why these financial models are very important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want the people to understand that all motor vehicle owners whether they are private, whether they are public are paying for this as well as by the employers who were contributing to the FNU levy. So, having said that, I want to thank the Members of the Committee and I am sure the Chairman of the Committee will response to any other issues that might be there.

HON. S. TUBUNA. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contributions and the issues that they have raised. Of course, now we realise this substantial benefit being provided to families that are being compensated, at the same time we should also be aware of the costs involved. I would like to thank the Deputy Prime Minister for raising that.

Of course, as alluded to by most of the honourable Members who have contributed, this is a system that has been working well and has addressed some of the issues that relates to accident victims when they are looking around and seeking assistance from the various organisations and of course from the various agencies in government. We noted from the issue that was brought up also and part of the recommendation was on sports and injury. It needs to be also addressed and researched given the enormity of the cost that will be involved in compensating those who will be affected by sports injury.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I totally agree with the issue that has also been raised by honourable Prof. Biman Prasad, the sustainability and how can we adequately ensure that we have a business model that works. Perhaps maybe that is an area the Government needs to look into, particularly now when we are looking at inadequate workmen in this country - the skills that are being required to ensure that we have people who can service the various industries that are requiring skilled tradesmen and manpower. I think that needs to be also adequately looked into when we are looking into a sustainable model to finance ACCF, particularly, when you are looking into the future of how we are going to sustainably develop.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contributions and of course I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their contribution to the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND
DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the Office of the Prime Minister and Department of Immigration 2018-2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 29th August, 2022.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of this august Parliament, I am thankful to be given this opportunity, as the Member moving the motion, to make a small contribution on the Report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights on the review of the Office of the Prime Minister and Department of Immigration 2018-2019 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, at the commencement of the new term of Parliament, there was a changeover of the Standing Committee membership and the newly appointed Standing Committee Members resolved to peruse through the highlights given that the Review Report was formulated and tabled by the Committee of the previous Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, in this respect, the Committee had noted some recurring issues highlighted in the Report which we felt were necessary to have further discussions on and allow honourable Members to provide a way forward in addressing some of these issues that were within the purview of the OPM.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the previous Committee had identified five key crucial findings:

- (1) The OPM has put in efforts in achieving the nation's development plan and the global agenda by supporting gender equality and the development of communities.
- (2) That the three-decade old Vatukoula Gold Mine dispute is still yet to be resolved.
- (3) Rotuma has been allotted the largest funding of \$240,000 as compared to Rabi, Kioa with a ceiling of \$155,000. During the reporting year, the Rotuma Subvention Fund was not utilised due to non-submission of the audited accounts by the Council of Rotuma.
- (4) Difficulties faced during the transition to e-passport system from the machine-readable Passports Management System. The sudden power fluctuations and shutdowns affect network system and delivery of service within the specified timeline. Some of the challenges include power fluctuations and failures in Fiji, causing network disruption

which, in turn, affects the service delivery hours at times.

- (5) There were weak internal controls that relate to financials for the Fiji Immigration Department which have been addressed through measures being put in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee notes the existence of these issues that I have just mentioned and also take note of the recommendations put forth by the previous Committee. For the consideration of the Office of the Prime Minister, the former Committee had formulated two recommendations which are:

Recommendation 1

In regard to the Vatukoula Gold Mine issue, it was noted that this has been long standing issue, and the efforts put in by all the parties involved is duly recognised, but for the purpose of resolving this issue, it is recommended that discussions be reinitiated as soon as possible whereby a settlement is reached that is agreed upon by all parties involved.

Recommendation 2

In regard to the non-utilisation of funds from the Rotuma Subvention Fund, the Committee supports the stance by the Office of the Prime Minister and recommends that adherence to necessary processes in place for submission of financial reports for audit should be maintained, and monitoring of this should be upheld so as not to affect the release of funds.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I, once again, commend the work carried out by the previous Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and I would also want to thank the Members of the current Committee: honourable Iliesa Vanawalu, honourable Mosese Bulitavu, honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and honourable Faiyaz Koya. I urge the honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the contents of the Committee's Report and to show support for the motion that is before this Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and before I offer the floor, all I would like to state now is that I have also received another list of speakers from the honourable Whips and the speakers would be in this order:

- (1) Honourable I.B. Seruiratu.
- (2) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change and Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs.
- (3) Honourable M.D. Bulitavu.
- (4) Honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration.
- (5) Honourable A.A. Maharaj.
- (6) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, being aware of the list of speakers, I will try to keep it brief. But let me acknowledge the work undertaken by the previous Committee and, of course, the current Committee, thank you for this Report. Of course, it has given Parliament some directions on what needs to be addressed and to acknowledge the work as well that has already been undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will start with the recommendations and then I will highlight some key aspects of the Report that I strongly feel is worth repeating, given the significance of these issues.

On the recommendations, I totally agree with the honourable Chairman, particularly on Recommendation 1, on the issue in Vatukoula. It is sad, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I am sure you are also aware. One of the challenges is just the common understanding between the stakeholders and for them to come into agreement as well on options and solutions.

Mr. Speaker, I know that at one stage with the Assistant Minister for Rural Development, Mr. Joeli Cawaki, he was assisting in facilitating, particularly in terms of housing, for those who have opted to return to their respective communities. But I hope that during this term of Parliament, something can be done so that this can be resolved.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Subvention Fund, I remember that towards the end of last year, this allocation has been redirected and restored to the community in Rotuma after they have met all the requirements. This is all about good governance and the better utilisation of these funds, and I think the same also applied for the Kiribati community, but I need to acknowledge the ongoing efforts.

There were some challenges highlighted in the Report. With new technologies, particularly with the new e-passport, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is always expected – teething issues with new technology. Of course, I think by now, that has been fixed. Of course, some management issues in terms of their finances as acknowledged in the Report, that has been fixed as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did say that there are a few things highlighted in the Report that I would probably like to highlight because of its significance, and one is on SDGs. You very well know, Sir, the role that Parliament plays now in terms of oversight on global issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2015 was a very interesting year. We had the SDGs; we had the Paris Agreement and we had the Sendai Framework as well. And one of the oversight responsibilities of all Parliaments throughout the world is on the implementation of most of these issues and, of course, to track the progresses made as well.

I think I would recommend to all the Committees when it comes to SDGs in all reports, let us open it to other SDG goals rather than restricting it to one. I will highlight, this is not to point out the weakness of the Committee, but it seems that this Report focuses on SDG5 - Gender Equality. Of course, the Office of the Prime Minister, I think, is one of the Offices in Fiji that has a good balance of gender and I think it is a challenge for the others.

But given the role that the Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for - SDG1 is on Poverty, SDG2 is on Zero Hunger, SDG5 is on Gender Equality and, of course, we have SDG on Education and Health. SDGs 13, 14 and 15 are also very, very critical not only for the work of the Committee but for Fiji, given its leading role in some of the issues that are also highlighted in this Report that I will touch on.

Sir, SDG13 is on Climate Action. SDG14 is on Life Below Water and SDG15 is on Life on Land. I am sure most of the honourable Members of this august Parliament are aware of these issues and I hope in our Parliament work, particularly when it comes to reporting, let us not limit it, let us identify the crosscutting issues because it is good for our Parliament as well, Sir, given our role as legislators and given the significance of these issues.

I have highlighted SDG13 on Climate Action. Perhaps, this is why I am highlighting this, as this is the challenge that we all have now - starting from the honourable Prime Minister and all Parliamentarians because of the significance of this issue, particularly to Pacific Islanders.

In the Pacific Leaders Forum, we now have the 2050 Blue Strategy for the Pacific. Mr. Speaker, Sir, why I am highlighting this as well, particularly for us when we go now, our voices need to be heard in these forums and there needs to be consistency. There is consistency, Sir, particularly in the work of climate action in the region.

It started on 2nd September, 2015 to 4th September, 2015 which was the *Suva Declaration*. The wordings of the *Suva Declaration* ended up in the *Paris Agreement*, particularly on the work on 1.5 Degrees target. It was a compromise, but we ensured that 1.5 Degrees target ended up in the Paris Agreement because it is so important for our survival. Of course, the Paris Agreement and all the meetings.

I noticed that the honourable Prime Minister has recently returned from the Panama - the nexus between oceans and climate. This is why all these SDGs are relevant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I wish to highlight it for all Committees because that is the way forward and that is something that we all need to address together as Parliamentarians, not only for the globe but, of course, for our citizens and our people.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister had wanted some information about New Zealand and he was not sure about it. Just talk to the honourable Minister for Sugar and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, who has just returned from New Zealand and he will have some information on that, and honourable Kamikamica and honourable Radrodro as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are very important issues because there is high expectation on the region, on Fiji, and there is high expectation as well at the global level, given the prominence that we have set in this.

I know that our Presidency on COP23 is highlighted in here and that is something that we need. We are not blowing our trumpet, but I think it is an achievement not only for us but for the region, for a small vulnerable island State, to become Chair of COP23.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the work of the former Prime Minister, particularly in his leadership in those areas, and I hope that all honourable Members of this august Parliament will continue with that good work.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Seruiratu for his contribution. In fact, he has almost stolen my thunder because I was just thinking that we would be wasting all the data that he has collected as our Champion for climate change if we just leave him out altogether.

And I go back to the thought that I had while I was on the other side of bipartisan approach to universal issues like climate change. I note that the former Vice-President of the United States of America immediately, after coming out of office, was appointed by the successor government to be the champion for climate change. Today, I rejected a recommendation for me to go to the next one in December and I was thinking of the honourable Seruiratu. "You go, that gives one more vote than you have."

(Laughter)

No, it does not give us one more, but it just gives us a safety net of one vote.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are here to debate the Report on the review of the Office of the Prime Minister and Department of Immigration 2018-2019 Annual Report which was tabled in August last

year.

As has been mentioned by the honourable Seruiratu, we thank the previous Committee - the very proud young man at the back there who chaired the previous Committee and thank him and the Members of his Committee for this Report that is before us today. I also thank the current Committee for the work that they have done and they have endorsed the Report of the previous Committee so we thank you, honourable Maharaj.

The motion presents to Parliament discussions on the Office of the Prime Minister and the Department of Immigration. As we all know, the Office of the Prime Minister provides sound coherent policy advice to the Prime Minister and maintains vigilant oversight of all other national policies.

The Office of the Prime Minister also provides high quality services and support to the Head of Government and support rendered is aimed at ensuring that all activities, engagements and policies that the Prime Minister contributes to or is involved in is in line with the Constitution, the laws of Fiji and the betterment of all Fijians.

The Department of Immigration is mandated to provide efficient and effective immigration services through the administration and enforcement of immigration related laws and international conventions. These services are mainstreamed to ensuring the integrity of Fiji's borders and the effective management of people in and out of Fiji.

Some of the points raised in the Report and has been raised by the previous speakers is on the Vatukoula Gold Mine. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very sad episode in our industrial relations history in Fiji. I remember that this was one of the arguments. They thought that I was involved in the initial stages of the Vatukoula Strike and I was even challenged by the two paramount Chiefs who were in office at that time because I spoke up in favour of the workers.

Mr. Geoffrey Reed, you will remember, was in charge of the Vatukoula Gold Mines at that time, was very upset and called his friends in high places in Fiji who labelled me as an 'angry young man'. I am no longer an angry young man, I am not even an angry old man.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we all agree that all parties should be involved to resolve that issue. There was a lot of encouragement for those who were fighting against the owners of the Mine coming in from Ba or when my colleague on the opposite side, honourable Bala was the Mayor and I put him there, but now he is here, we will work together to resolve that issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Rotuma Subvention Fund, we would like to maintain good relationship with the leadership of Rotuma and they have promised to cooperate and make sure that their accounts and all these other things are in place. In the meantime, they have recommended someone to be the liaison between the Council and the Prime Minister's Office.

Going back to COP23, there is a question coming up later in the afternoon which I will ask to speak very briefly on because I have a Cabinet paper going to Cabinet tomorrow, on the Report of our Oceans Conference that was held in Panama.

I agree with honourable Seruiratu about our success so far from our elevation to the top table in COP23 - that negotiations and discussions and as I will mention briefly this afternoon, I am very proud that in 1992, we participated in the Earth Summit in Rio when we sent our then Minister for Urban Development, Housing and Environment to attend that very first one. We thought that was the first, but it was 20 years after the earlier one in 1972 in Sweden - talking about all these things

that now we have written them down into Sustainable Development Goals, et cetera.

On the passports, Sir, we had some teething problems, but I believe that we have to march with the rest of the world and this is the way the rest of the world is going, so we sharpen up our activities, actions and our performance as we provide e-passports for all our new passport holders.

The Small Grant Schemes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been successful but only as successful as the strength of our economy, but they have been very well accepted and very well distributed. There have been a lot of joy to the recipients who have received this over time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have little else, apart from the fact that we are working on the Rabi Council at the moment to get their accounts audited. And there is now a standing invitation from the Parliament and the President of Kiribati for us to send them a representative of our Banaban Community in Rabi and the only problem before was that, they did not have a Rabi Council because there was no election and no audited accounts. Hopefully, all those can be corrected so that we can send someone to attend the Parliament of Kiribati. As we all know, they have a nominated member from Rabi sitting in the Parliament of Kiribati.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also support that we note the Report tabled by the Committee.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my contribution to the motion that is before Parliament and, that is, to commend to note the review of the Office of the Prime Minister and the Department of Immigration 2018-2019 Annual Report.

As alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister, I think the overarching role of the Ministry is to look into the coordination of the various Ministries that the Office of the Prime Minister monitors. This comes in line too with the announcement by the honourable Prime Minister in February this year, that there is a decision-making machinery that will help in this coordination and also monitoring the implementation of the various projects and policies that is in line with the Coalition's framework.

But the Report that is before us is for the financial year 2018 and 2019. It is aligned to the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, plus the 5 Year and 20 Year National Development Plan which has the overarching goal of building a better Fiji for all Fijians. That particular goal was for this particular financial year and that was we have seen through perusing, scrutiny and also deliberations on the Report with the staff from the Office of the Prime Minister and their Corporate Division and also staff from their Projects Division, who had assisted the Committee in its deliberations on various clarifications and information that the Committee had sought from the Office of the Prime Minister.

According to one of the key roles of the Office of the Prime Minister is to address the socio-economic development needs of the people. What we have seen from the last Administration, through the former Prime Minister on the various rural visitations that he had in various Divisions was that, most of the time he is engaging with people on a touch-base timely manner, sometimes making decisions on the spot. That is something that I would like to urge the Coalition Government, to increase their engagement with the people, moving into the community, especially decision-making at divisional level when they are engaged in various *talanoa sessions* with the people during their visits.

The other projects that the honourable Prime Minister had alluded to in terms of the Small Grant Scheme, there was about \$3.2 million that was directed for education projects and \$1.3 million

was for villages - construction of village halls and evacuation centres. For the education projects, the construction of the Maivalili Teachers Quarters in Cakaudrove and for the village projects, the construction of a hall and evacuation centre at Sawaieke, Gau; a nursing station at Nawaikama in Gau, and other community projects that took place. In Tailevu North, there was a bedroom for teachers quarters and also other renovations to the Suva Methodist Primary School in Suva.

Those are achievements through the Small Grant Scheme under the Office of the Prime Minister which we hope to see will continue under the Coalition Government because it really helps in assisting our communities - getting our Prime Minister to look at the areas of need from the people who would like to engage directly.

Other things that were highlighted in this particular financial year was the fact that Fiji has increased its global footprint, not only after the end of the COP23 Presidency. Fiji in this particular year, was also part of the negotiations of COP24 in Poland where our former Prime Minister co-chaired that particular COP.

The other thing that was raised was the number of complaints that was received by the Office of the Prime Minister then. They have a system in place that addresses those complaints and go back to the people to see that the various complaints that they have registered in the Office of the Prime Minister are attended to. I hope that, that will be continued by the current Administration on how our people can be properly served and the service delivery to the various communities that are there.

However, again, all shows the achievement that has been done in the previous administration that is there plus other engagements with the other counterparts in that particular year where the honourable Prime Minister then also met the former Prime Minister of Australia – Mr. Scott Morrison and also discussions on to our Vuvale Partnership that has enabled the partnership between Fiji, New Zealand and Australia plus other labour schemes and other things that we are benefiting through our engagement with Australia and New Zealand, even though our rugby team franchise *Fijian Drua* plus other things we are also engaging with New Zealand and Australian communities in terms of labour schemes.

These are few things that we have highlighted and we hope that we will continue, the common narrative by the Government and plus others in the social media, “what you have been doing for the last 16 years?” But again, these are achievements that we can build on from the legacy, from the last eight years of parliamentary democracy, what the benchmark that FijiFirst Government has set through the premise of very well structured annual reports that come before the Committee and we hope that the current structure of annual reports that will come to the Committee will follow these formats because it clearly outlines the various objectives of various ministries plus key performance indicators plus various targets that are aligned to the SDGs that was alluded to by the honourable Inia Seruiratu.

Those are few things and I commend the Report that is before Parliament and also we move forward from whatever that has been done by this particular Ministry.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I invite the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, for the purposes of applying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

Under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) be suspended so as to allow Parliament to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we can note from the Order Paper before us, we still have one remaining report to debate, apart from the one that we are currently debating, as well as Question time. There are still remaining eight Oral Questions and two Written Questions. We still have some business to get through, therefore, I seek the indulgence of Parliament to allow for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. to be able to get through the business in Parliament.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have nothing more to add, thank you.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament for afternoon tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.04 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.36 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will proceed with the speeches on the motion.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, please, allow me just to make a short contribution to this debate on the Report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights on the 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Prime Minister and the Department of Immigration. You will understand, Mr. Speaker, that after the rearrangements under the Coalition Government, the Department of Immigration is now under the Ministry of Home Affairs looking after the Department of Immigration.

In this Report that is before Parliament today has very little comments about the functions of the Department of Immigration. I believe there was an observation with regards to some accounts that were not quite cleared but at the end of the Report, the Committee acknowledged that that has been cleared. I am also glad to mention here at this stage that the ensuing accounts of the Department of Immigration after that for the last two years have actually been unqualified audit reports, so that is a remarkable achievement by the Department of Immigration.

Mr. Speaker, you will know that the Department of Immigration is responsible for border security, looking after Fijians, our guests and our friends that come into Fiji and also leave Fiji at the end of their stay. Part of their work is to ensure the security of our entry points, particularly at the border both in our airports and also in our seaports.

The Department is quite challenged at the moment in terms of the support that it has, that is, in given overtime to be able to provide this work for Fiji, which is very, very important. Of course, the first line of defence for Fiji is our Department of Immigration. As people come through Nadi or through Suva or our seaports to make sure that they do not come with the usual shenanigans that people bring from across the other side of the sea to bring into Fiji. So, it is very important that we have a professional department that is well supported in every aspect to be able to keep Fiji secure and safe.

This is something that the Department continues to try and do to be able to perform its functions despite the limitations of the resources that it has got. I would just like to say that at the moment our Suva Office is being relocated because that building is actually not fit for human habitation. I believe the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service owns that building. I am glad that that building has been identified by the Ministry of Finance that the Department is going to move into.

One other issue, in particular that the Department deals with in a big way is the issuance of passports. We will understand that now in the digital era, the new passports that we have which conforms to international standards of travel, that is, in the report mentioned that there were glitches at the beginning, but I am glad that a lot of that has been cured since the time this Report was written and submitted.

But suffice to say, Mr. Speaker, that there is a great demand for passports in Fiji today and it is putting on a lot of strain on our immigration officials to be able to produce for the people of Fiji these passports when they need them. Obviously the conditions are quite clear for the issuance of passports, those that want their passport almost immediately and those that have to pay just enough so that they can get it over a working week.

One other aspect that relates to passports and I am sure this is something that I see has been listed in one of the agenda items for the days to come where there has been some concerns about Fijian passports that have been issued to a whole range of people who are now living in Fiji, in terms

of whether they are qualified to have this passport issued to them and become Fiji citizens. I think when we travel around we see a whole range of people who now say that they are citizens and have qualified by time. We are doing some research into that to find out whether how many of those have been issued and whether they have been issued under the current laws that are in place for people to follow.

One of the concerns now, Mr. Speaker, is that the qualification by naturalisation. There are some concerns that are being aired by our people who are formally Fijian citizens and also their families who want to get a Fijian Passport and that is the cost of having to get a Fijian Passport and now that other nationalities are allowed to acquire Fijian Passports dual citizenry under the current laws that we have. So, the cost of acquiring citizenship by naturalisation is a concern by them. I must assure you, Mr. Speaker, Parliament and the people that the Government is looking at this and hopefully in the future we will have a report on the deliberations of Government with regards to this particular request.

On the matter of work permit process, this has always been a concern. Our private sector is always concerned that immigration is not always quick enough, no sense of urgency - words that they say in terms of facilitating investments in Fiji through acquiring permits under the proper process. But you will understand, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of our border and who we allow to come in is a matter of our national concern and whilst we want to facilitate to get people to come and work in Fiji by way of work of permit, we must also be conscience that we also have issues that could come with these problems. We are looking at talking to the private sector for now, looking at better ways on how we can be more efficient in granting work permits for those that want to come and work here.

The last issue perhaps I want to raise, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of one of things that we look at is the granting of citizenship. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that few years ago, the laws were changed from five years to 15 years to qualify and become a Fijian. This has been a cause of many heartaches for more people because they do not seem to be able to understand why such an extension of time, five years was and then that had to be increased twice before they can qualify.

This is a matter that needs to be looked at fairly, particularly for genuine people who want to become Fijians and be granted citizenry. They have to be granted the liberty in all fairness. So this is a policy that Government wants to look at and hopefully come out with some positive outcome that is not only good for those who are applying, but also benefit the Fijian people through the services of those who will acquire the citizenship other than through the grants of naturalisation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is my contribution and I thank the Committee and all my colleagues who have spoken on this matter, particularly on the Department of Immigration and I support the motion that is before Parliament.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset I would like to congratulate Miss Fiji, Miss Gitali Ram, for the wonderful show at the Beauty International Pageant and returning home as First Runner-Up.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- While I stood up this morning to deliver my speech on the Municipal Councils, honourable Minister for Finance labelled my speech as sensible, so I consider myself now to be following the path of honourable Bala rather than actually trying to talk some sense to them.

With regards to the Office of the Prime Minister, I believe it is a very important one and I, as the previous Chairperson, we did scrutinise this and this is my Report that is being actually debated today in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Prime Minister is primarily responsible for providing sound policy advice and support to honourable Prime Minister and his Cabinet. The Department of Immigration is mandated in providing efficient and effective immigration services through the administration enforcement of immigration related laws and international conventions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, year 2018 and 2019, through the very strong and decisive leadership of honourable Bainimarama at the Prime Minister's Office, the Office and the Department of Immigration engaged with international and regional development partners, civil society organisations and the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2018 was a very proud moment for the Fijians and Fiji as a whole as the former Prime Minister was the President of COP23. It was through the engagement at international level that we saw development partners funding projects in Fiji to build resilience against climate change. There were so many projects funded that our former Prime Minister negotiated that saw many villages around Fiji relocated to higher grounds.

This relocation was not just building new houses, but moving the entire livelihood from one location to another; sea walls were built and so many other projects were funded through the effort of our former Prime Minister, a true gentleman who flew the Fiji's flag high in the sky and ensured his Ministers also flew the Fiji flag high and maintained the professionalism and dignity when they appeared on the international arena.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I also salute our current honourable Prime Minister for doing the same, unlike what we have seen for some honourable Ministers from the Government side visiting overseas, being drunk and appearing to be a total nuisance.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order, honourable Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What the honourable Member is talking about...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... is irrelevant.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Maybe if you listened, you will hear it.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Under what Point of Order?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Under what Point of Order?

MR. SPEAKER.- You rise on what Point of Order, Madam?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the honourable Member is talking about is irrelevant to the Report that is before Parliament. He should stick to the Report, even if it is a subject matter, still it does not connect.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- He comes from the Prime Minister's Office.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is a cheap shot against the Government. He should withdraw those comments. Withdraw it! Stop imputing the character....

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not my cheap comments with regards to the Government, it is one of the honourable Minister's cheap comments and it is shown on media as well about health issues, *Walesi* and Cabinet decisions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is secret information, it should not be out in the public space.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He did not reveal any secret information.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- When we are out of the country, we all represent Fiji and that is the level of professionalism we should maintain. One does not need to be told how they should behave at international forums. Shame on honourable Charan Jeath Singh!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order again, Mr. Speaker.

Please, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member again is being irrelevant and outside of the Report. He needs to withdraw those comments. Standing Order 60, you just used it, have you forgotten?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- No.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Right. Standing Order 60 - Relevance. Stick to the subject. Stop attacking MPs in Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Maharaj, could you confine yourself to the Report?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, Sir. I ask the honourable Minister to resign as well.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, during September that year, the Department of Immigration successfully embarked on e-passports. As we all are aware that e-passport is one of the major requirements for visa on arrival for most of the countries. Having fulfilled the preliminaries, the Department and this Government can now negotiate for visa on arrival with other countries as well. I will now go into details of some of the key highlights and issues that were identified from the review.

Firstly, it was identified that Vatukoula Gold Mine dispute has been long outstanding, which is over three decades old, that there were numerous attempts along the way to resolve the issue. The legal opinion on the cause of the issue had been sought from the Office of the Solicitor-General and it is sad to say that led to a stalemate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was noted that the Gold Mine Company did not breach the contract agreement between them and individuals who had been affected. The government then stepped in to try to bring about an amicable solution and there was even an *ex gratia* payment to the affected

people. These sorts of payments are considered as reward given and not necessarily something that one is obliged to pay but does so as a way of recognition and appreciation of their work.

However, there were individuals who felt that that was not enough, thus wanted compensation for the 30 years of dispute and a substantial amount of money for this; \$2 million per person to be exact. This motion by this individual is contrary to the legal opinion and should be kept in mind that the Government, not the Gold Mine Company had any obligation to offer compensation thus this issue remains unresolved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last term of Parliament, the Opposition raised this concern that we, as the then government needed to resolve the issue, and now with them in Government, let us see if they can get this issue resolved. Interesting days are ahead, and people are waiting.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You left a mess, that is what we are going to fix.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, we will see when, \$2 million per person.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You left a mess.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Moving on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the \$9 million budget allocation to the Office of the Prime Minister for the Small Grant Scheme Programme, \$5.2 million was utilised with a total of 70 projects funded during the financial year in the education sector, village settlements and other integrated sectors. For the donor aid projects, only one project was undertaken and compiled while 10 projects are still on feasibility study. The fund is there, the project is there as well, so you can now complete the project, wear the *salusalu* and cut ribbons.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- (Inaudible)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Do not worry, you can thank us later for those programmes.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was noted that the Rotuma Subvention Fund were not released due to the non-submission of the audited accounts by the Council of Rotuma.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Immigration Department undertook a joint venture agreement with Muhlbauer High Tech International for the introduction of e-passport. The total cost of the investment is approximately FJ\$7.8 million to FJ\$8 million. This covered the cost of hardware and software installation, et cetera.

The e-passport system is enclosed by a secure firewall and uses access control as part of its security measures. This, together with the Department's security regulation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) safeguards the integrated e-passports issuance system. The Fiji Immigration Department has also reviewed and developed numerous SOPs to boost efficiency of the service it provides such as faster turnaround time for application outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen lately that people who were barred to enter Fiji are coming back to Fiji. Was there any due diligence done? Is there any committee to review the status before allowing these people to enter Fiji, or just because they supported one of the Coalition Parties, they are allowed to come back?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- They are citizens.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- There is a need for a system to be in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the same note, does the Immigration Act allows a foreign national who is here on work permit to be politically involved with a political party?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- This was, again, Mr. Speaker, confirmed by the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry that one of the foreign nationals is actively involved in politics in Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Aww!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- He is on record and now he has been told that he can openly show support for the Government.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Very poor!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The Office of the Prime Minister's Development Cooperation and Facilitation Division is responsible for Small Grants Scheme, which is also provided to rural and outer island communities. It is worth noting that this Scheme is aimed at addressing the needs of these communities in terms of village and settlement improvement, education and climate-resilient projects. These were done through *talanoa* session initiated by the former Prime Minister.

Projects were identified through these sessions, and it was not based on locations, province, ethnicity or religion. There was a simple criterion - if you are a Fijian and you need assistance, assistance will be provided, unlike what we hear from the current Government that they need ethnic data to develop policies to assist Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we totally agree that the Office of the Prime Minister should have this kind of funds available to support Small Grant Schemes because it helps each and every Fijian, but the support should be given without any strings attached.

It was also noted that both the Offices had given much effort in empowering their female staff by encouraging attendance to training and development programmes. In the Report, for the third year, the Office of the Prime Minister had 37 percent male and 62.8 percent female who were provided and supported through capacity building and development programmes. For the Fiji Immigration Department, gender mainstreaming ratio stood at 53 percent female to 47 percent male, whereby 68 trainings were conducted through overseas and local courses and a total of 131 officers attended. Thank, you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me begin by saying that the Office of the Prime Minister was provided with a budget of \$24.1 million in the 2018-2019 Budget. In 2022-2023 financial year, a substantial decrease is notable by about 30 percent with only \$16.9 million allocated and the major decrease in the Small Grants Scheme was from \$9 million in 2018-2019 to \$1 million in the 2022-2023 financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the history of Small Grant Projects is from 2005 and it is administered by the Office of the Prime Minister. Prior to 2005, the Scheme was funded through an annual grant by the Taiwanese Government and was facilitated by the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Scheme, Mr. Speaker, was used to fund community-based projects that are requested by the communities and organisations directly to the honourable Prime Minister and they covered a wide range of areas like education assistance, water, electricity, village settlement development projects,

women's projects, sanitation and income generating projects.

So, since the inception of the Small Grants Scheme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2005, Government spent around \$44.8 million to fund 656 Small Grant Projects. Obviously, the sum allocated in the 2022-2023 Budget was just \$1 million and as a Government, Mr. Speaker, we believe that this Grant is important, and we will be looking at restoring better allocations to the honourable Prime Minister's Office for Small Grant Projects.

Let me just respond to some of the moralising that was coming from the other side but before that Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with the honourable Seruiratu. I think the leadership of the Prime Minister of any country, including ours, is absolutely vital, not only in the country, regionally but also internationally. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, after 16 years, we now have a Prime Minister who can stand on his feet, who can be respected and who shows the humility, understanding, not only of regional international politics but what he is doing right now in the country.

The Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a philosophy, we believe in inclusive consultative and leadership with humility and our honourable Prime Minister has provided that. The last 16 years and in the last four years or five years, Mr. Speaker, we have seen, not only the lack of leadership internationally, but a total disregard and failure of leadership in the Pacific.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The regional unity was fractured under their Government, those who are sitting on that side.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- And it took our Prime Minister...

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What is your Point of Order?

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- My Point of Order is under Standing Order 62(4), for your information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is quite offensive - absolutely offensive, for the honourable Member to be talking about the former Prime Minister of this country, who took this country to one of the fastest growing countries in the world. This gentleman needs to keep in check with what he says. Stop going on about the past! Stop being a whinging pom! Concentrate on what you are trying to do because I can tell you, Sir, right now, he is actually being offensive to a Prime Minister who led this country for 16 years and he has done no wrong.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, through the exchanges that I have been hearing right throughout the day, I think all of you should be developing a very, very thick skin here. If you can

give it, you should take it as well.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is not recommended, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue, honourable Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They will get used to being in the Opposition after a while. They are under this illusion and maybe some of them are still hallucinating. It seems to me that they are still hallucinating that they are actually in Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me say this, that our regional solidarity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was fractured. The region has suffered the disunity. It took our honourable Prime Minister to make a trip to Kiribati, a one-day trip to bring Kiribati back into the Forum. We hosted a very successful Pacific Leaders Summit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me say this and they will not like it.

(Inaudible interjection)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- There is too much finger pointing.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There is a sense of exuberance, optimism and confidence amongst the international community...

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Must be having it for yourself.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... amongst the international community, amongst the people in this country and there is a sense of freedom that has come under the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister.

Let me also talk about immigration. The honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration provided a good summary of some of the issues, and Mr. Speaker, the Immigration Department was used by those sitting on the other side and the leadership.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, tell them! Tell them!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Immigration Department was used, Mr. Speaker ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- In your area.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... to punish people who they did not like.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Yes!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Foreigners who meant well for this country, who had invested in this country, who wanted to look good for this country, were victimised by these people because

they felt that they were not supportive of them and they were critical.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me also say this, Mr. Speaker, they should stop moralising.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Stop preaching!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Maharaj stands up and talks about the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, why?

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- But they forgot, Mr. Speaker, that their Leader assaulted an honourable Member of Parliament.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Aah!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Your Minister was suspended.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, after assaulting him, he comes into Parliament with the support of those honourable Members sitting there, gets into the Privileges Committee and suspends the honourable Member.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I will tell you the Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, he does not like to hear this.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Can't take the heat.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is not about taking the heat, Sir, it is about raising what was raised to us, to say about relevance by the honourable Tabuya, we are now raising the same thing - relevance, Sir. Stop talking about nonsense, get on with what is actually before you! Relevance, Sir.

I, again, raise Standing Order 60 in terms of the Standing Orders, on relevance.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, I have not finished. You raised it to us, so we are raising it back to you. Relevance!

MR. SPEAKER.- Carry on, honourable Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is completely relevant, Mr. Speaker, because I am very clearly responding to what came from the other side.

These people have short memories, Mr. Speaker, about their own embarrassment of supporting a Leader...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... who they now want to praise, for assaulting an honourable Member of Parliament and then getting their support to actually suspend him and remain in this Parliament.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is right.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Shame on you!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Now, shame on them, Mr. Speaker. Shame on them!

On Immigration, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I realised when I was in Opposition, that there was a standing instruction from their leaders who are not in Parliament but outside, that they should all make noise when I speak. So, maybe that is the instruction they are getting now.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Hon. A.A. Maharaj interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Then why have you not shut up?

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, let me come back to the Immigration. It was such a stupid decision to change the immigration laws to require people to come and live here for 15 years before they got citizenship. No one, behind investors and behind the funding that we want people to bring into the country, are people.

These are people who want to come and invest, who want to live in this country, but we now have an immigration policy which is completely contrary to what we are trying to do to create an investment climate, to improve the ease of doing business and to have an efficient immigration system, but all was destroyed because they were busy using the Immigration Department to victimise people. And I am glad that the honourable Minister for Home Affairs pointed all those out and I think he is dealing with it.

But let me conclude by saying once again, Mr. Speaker, that the honourable Members who were part of the previous Government will be better off just jogging their memories about what they used to do when they were in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, we, as a Government, are going to be different. Our honourable Prime Minister has pointed that out, I have said that, that we are going to provide inclusive consultative and leadership with humility. The honourable Prime Minister just said that he wants the Opposition to be involved in his leadership of taking Fiji on the international stage, getting all the benefits that Fiji can get through that process of dialogue and consultation.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that after a while, they will learn that we have a Leader now, we have people on this side who can show humility and understanding and who can work with them because they are now struggling to remain relevant because the ones who are at the top have all abandoned them. They are now struggling to remain relevant by still praising them. My advice to them is, forget about them move on, let us make this Parliament very workable and let us work for the country.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, on my right of reply, I thank the honourable Members for a robust debate and contributions. Thank you very much for that.

I welcome the point from the honourable Seruiratu, that the Committee should sit and look at the SDGs. Thank you very much for that point, honourable Member. We will look at the recommendations and as the honourable Prime Minister has noted and stated that, firstly, with regards to Vatukoula, this is a collective effort, and we need to work on this. As the honourable Member from the other side said, it has been 30 years or so and we are still just making more and more recommendations. I invite the other side of Parliament to join this side and make a collective effort and sort this issue out with regards to the Vatukoula Gold Mines.

With regards to Recommendation 2, I thank the honourable Prime Minister in notifying this august Parliament on the work with the Rotuma Subvention Fund, as well as the Rabi Island Council. However, we are still waiting for their financial report, and we will be sending someone to Kiribati. On that note, Mr. Speaker, there is also the Melanesian Fund in the Office of the Prime Minister and I thank the Office as a whole, the Corporate Services Division Team for their Annual Report.

I thank the Immigration Department and their contribution, and to take note from some of the points from the Immigration Department as alluded to by the honourable Minister that they are relocating to a new building which is a good turnout for the Immigration Department, and new and more changes are coming with regards to the Department.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Office of the Prime Minister for their Report. I thank the previous Standing Committee on compiling this Report and the current Committee for this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - FIJI PUBLIC TRUSTEE CORPORATION PTE LIMITED 2018 AND 2019 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Pte Limited 2018 and 2019 Annual Reports.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion before Parliament.

The Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited provides services in the management and administration of estates and trusts to those beneficiaries who have appointed the trustees. It offers services of a specialised nature which involved the identification and collection of assets, the identification of beneficiaries and the management and subsequent transmission of both, movable and immovable properties, either as an estate or a trust.

This Review Report was compiled by the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament, and I wish to convey my utmost appreciation on their efforts in scrutinising and compiling the Report which was tabled to Parliament in August last year.

On the same note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish the Members of the current Committee the very best in their deliberations of the Committee Reports in this new term of Parliament.

The Committee upon been referred with the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited Annual Reports requested for public hearing.

The Committee also received written responses from the Corporation where the Committee was enlightened on the following, that the Corporation:

- (1) Prioritised strategies on maintaining stakeholders' engagement and ensuring that customers are satisfied with the level and various types of services provided to achieve its corporate goals.
- (2) Employs various methods to assess satisfaction levels, such as collecting feedback during community awareness sessions and outreach programme and establishing an MOU Business Partnership Agreement and other mutual working arrangements with the other relevant stakeholders.
- (3) Plans to extend its services to those living in rural and maritime areas, villages and the peri-urban centres.

For the periods under review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Corporation noted significant achievements on its business performance. Revenue had increased by 37 percent and in 2019, the Corporation marked milestone achievements in the appointment of the Sub-Committees for Audit, Governance and Risk, Legal, and Human Resources. This has resulted in heightened attention to the audit and oversight functions, which was translated in the engagement of an externally appointed internal audit for the business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has highlighted its findings for the Corporation's financial and operational performance for 2018-2019 and subsequently made recommendations to improve the Corporation's service delivery which, I believe, has been implemented by now.

The Committee also commenced the team of dedicated and motivated individuals who have worked together to bring the Public Trustee Corporation Limited to new heights through the enhancement of service delivery which remains a significance strategy in achieving their vision, which is to remain competitive and financially viable in the long term. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. As usual, I have three Members on the list that has been provided by the honourable Whips, as follows:

- (1) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change and Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs.
- (2) Honourable V. Pillay.
- (3) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I rise to contribute to the debate on this Report from the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. I also would like to thank and congratulate the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on her appointment and for performing the duties of Chairperson, including the tabling of this Report.

I also wish to thank the Chairman and Members of the previous Standing Committee for their work in preparing what is now being brought to us.

As Minister for Public Enterprises, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited (FPTCL) falls within my responsibility under the Public Enterprises Act - an Act that was legislated in my previous term and part of the Public Sector Reform started by the then SVT-led Coalition Government from 1992 and 1999, just conforming with what the rest of the world was doing, going towards the restructuring of Government, going through corporatisation and even further into privatisation.

I note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Office of the Public Trustees which was established during the colonial times was corporatised as part of that corporatisation programme in April 2006 by the former SDL Government, led by the late Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase.

Its services to the people have continued and being extended by the former Government as every government does, that we continuously try to improve the services established before our time, improved by those before us and we owe it to the people to continue improving.

The new Peoples Coalition Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will continue in that way, to continue to improve the various developments that we have inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will address the recommendations by the Standing Committee:

Recommendation 1

The Corporation should pursue existing forums such as the Bose ni Yasana, Bose ni Tikina, Advisory Councils, Youth and Religious Conventions, organised farmer groups, et cetera, to raise awareness on its various products and services.

In response to that, I would like to say that the Committee recommendations are noted. They were noted by the previous Government, and the previous Government started taking remedial and corrective measures in the areas that were recommended.

The Corporation, over the past years, have been engaged in community awareness through various Government Expo right around the country and joined Government awareness team to the maritime islands.

The Corporation will continue to collaborate with respective Government Ministries, Civil Societies, Groups and Councils, including those identified by the Committee in its community

awareness. That is part of the FPTCL's operation and business plan and will be monitored accordingly.

I am encouraging the Board of FPTCL to work to ensure that its services are decentralised. In that regard, the Corporation will co-operate and work in partnership with Provincial Councils, District Advisory Council, as well as the newly re-established Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs in encouraging our people to access its services.

Recommendation 2

That the Corporation consider making its services more accessible to persons living with disabilities, in partnership with the relevant Disability Organisations.

In response to that, the work has already started, we will continue. The Corporation has fully complied with the recommendations through their Suva and Labasa Offices and FPTCL has modified their office spaces to also cater for those with disabilities and they are remodifying the Lautoka office to allow accessibility for people with disabilities. The FPTCL continued working towards ensuring that their services are more accessible to all.

Recommendation 3

That the Corporation continues to upgrade and enhance its ICT capabilities for its business enhancement.

The response to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee's recommendation is noted and the previous Government during their term, the Corporation began its IT Modernisation Plan in 2019 with the digitisation programme which includes digitisation of records and processes, online services and customer relationship management system.

It is worth noting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that investment formed a major part of the Corporation's capital expenditure budget with a goal of increasing accessibility of the company's services or the Corporation's services and efficiency of its business processes.

Recommendations 4

That the Corporation explore new business opportunities to increase its income streams in order to remain competitive and financially viable in the long-term.

The same response. The Corporation has taken note of the Report and the Committee's recommendation and this Government will oversee the continuation of those improvements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all I have for this afternoon in support of this motion that is before us. I reiterate that every Government owes it to the previous one to continue the improvement and make life better for all the people in the country.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I contribute to the Report for debate on the Review of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited (FPTCL), at the outset, I would like to acknowledge the work done by the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament - the current Minister for Health and Medical Services (honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu), honourable Alipate Nagata and former Members of Parliament (honourable Salote Radrodoro and honourable George Vegenathan) and the Committee I chaired in the effort of putting this Report together.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Corporation is a public enterprise, therefore, operate without any cost to Government and it is governed by the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Act 2006. Some of the key

highlights of the Corporation as at 31st December, 2019 were total value of estates stood at \$67.1 million. In 2019, 58 new estates were accepted and valued at \$7.8 million, 4,293 wills were registered of which 290 were drafted and 55 executed in 2019. A total value of trusts stood at \$13 million. In 2019, 66 new trusts were accepted and valued at \$66,000.

The Corporation had a net value of \$17 million, 6,861 trusts were administered. There were a total of 1,895 deceased estates with over 11,000 beneficiaries. The Corporation had a total of 30 permanent staff of which 65 percent were females and 35 percent were males. Partnerships were signed with Telecom Fiji Limited (TFL) and Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) and eight charities were assisted with a value of \$130,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Pacific Regional Champion for Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities and former Chairperson of Standing Committee on Social Affairs, we queried the Corporation on how they ensured the inclusion of people living with disabilities through its service provision and programmes. We noted that it is a work in progress.

With that being said, I urge all Members of Parliament to be champions in promoting disability inclusiveness in infrastructures, schools, workplaces, policy making et cetera on the pledge for living no one behind. This also can be actioned through the Standing Committee processes via annual report scrutiny.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish the management, the Board Members and the staff of Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited (FPTCL) well to continue delivering the best service and positive financial results.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. I would speak on the Recommendation 4 which says that the Corporation explore new business opportunities to increase the income streams in order to remain competitive and financially viable in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we note the number of new initiatives by FPTCL such as the family trust, the charity trust and the pre-paid funeral trust. These initiatives do bring a number of benefits. Just quickly for the information of our people, the family trust legally protects partial or full assets of a family.

Families can register various types of assets into their family trust including their home. The charitable trusts protects partial or full assets specifically for charitable purposes and allows the trust to support causes and charities on an ongoing basis. Unlike other trusts, the charitable trust is perpetual and has no vesting day.

The pre-paid funeral trust allows a person to set money aside to pay for funeral expenses when a person passes away. We do encourage the company to work closely with similar organisations in other jurisdictions and adopt initiatives that might suit Fiji. We must also encourage the company to explore the possibility of diversifying into other services where it is legally and financially practical.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for her Right of Reply.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the honourable Members who have contributed to the debate this afternoon and we have certainly taken into consideration all the points that have been raised.

I had stated earlier that the four recommendations of the Corporation have now been implemented and we have also taken into consideration some of the important issues raised by the honourable Members when we will deliberate on the 2020 Annual Report of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Government's Plan for the Land Bank (Question No. 01/2023)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on Government's plan for the Land Bank and whether it will be maintained or removed?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am delighted to kick start the questions and answers session in this year's Parliament term and I am glad to take the question from the honourable gentleman, who was the previous Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources in the previous Government .

I might say from the start, Mr. Speaker, that as a responsible Government, a Government that has promised to consult, that is exactly what we will do. We will consult with the people on the Land Bank and whether it will be maintained or not and I suppose that would apply to any other law that we may wish to develop, amend all laws that we might even choose to repeal. But allow me, Mr. Speaker, to highlight a few features of the Land Bank as of the 31st December, 2022. Sir, 82 leases had been issued under the Land Bank that came into effect under Land Use Act 2010. This was at the inception on 2nd July, 2010.

The Land Use Unit presently, Mr. Speaker, is administering 66 leases, some have expired out of the 82 and a couple have now been re-entered. Under the Land Use Act 2010, a total of 10,080.42 hectares, equivalent to 245,988.26 acres of land which is owned by 105 landowning units have now already been designated by the Prime Minister's Office from 2011 to 2022. They also administer 14 buy back lands which total an area of 667.598 hectares, equivalent to 1,649.67 acres. These had also been designated. There are seven parcels of State land which comprise an area of 385.6807 hectares, equivalent of 953.037 acres. These had also been designated by the previous Government and under the hand of the previous Prime Minister.

When I say, Mr. Speaker, consultation will have to be made, they will have to be made with iTLTB being the Administrator of native land or *iTaukei* land, consultation will also have to be made with the landowners who have had their land in the bank, consultation, of course, will have to be made with the lessees those who now have a lease for a period of time for which time still remains. A lease, Mr. Speaker, you would understand and also to the honourable Parliament, we all understand it is a legal document. A document that has convenience and obligations both by the Director of Lands and those who lease those lands under the Land Bank.

Some lessees have expanded a large amount of funds in these leases, others are looking for investment, it would be a legal and a financial tragedy to bring all of these to an end without proper consultation. Government of course, Mr. Speaker, must consider the cost that incurs in these Land Bank system because as you would understand, Sir, all services cost under the Land Bank is absorbed by Government. Surveys, valuation, for example, are borne by Government.

Since 2011, Mr. Speaker, until 2022, the 2023 budgetary year \$18.1 million have been spent by the Land Management Use Division of the Ministry and that has managed to bring in \$11.4 million to the Landowning Units and they come by way of premium, ground rental, humanitarian needs or funds and by way of royalties. I may add to that, that all proceeds from these leases, Mr. Speaker, are given to the landowners and none are kept by Government. In all of these, Government has spent, as I mentioned \$18.1 million, the revenue that it gets has only amounted to \$573,430.63. Mr. Speaker, this then begs the question whether it is the role of the Ministry of Lands to administer the land other than State lands which lands really opt to be administered by the iTLTB.

Laws are passed by Parliament at least that is how laws are supposed to be passed. The Land Use Act 2010 was first introduced as a Decree, and we all know how those Decrees came to existence without parliamentary debate and of course without public discourse. Mr. Speaker, you would see why we all find ourselves in this legal doldrum.

In the past government, they passed laws without consultation. We, the Coalition Government will not do that. We will consult then we will act, then we will enact laws. We are in touch with the various landowning units who have their land in the Land Bank, the lessees and if there are any legal issues that needs to be ironed out, we will do that and we will endeavour to do our best.

So as a responsible Government, Mr. Speaker, we will consult to determine whether the Land Bank should be maintained or removed and if it is going to be removed, we are going to provide the transition of those leases under special protective lease scheme to the iTLTB under a Bill necessary in Parliament, of course through consultation and with debate to amend the iTaukei Land Trust Act 1940.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to see that there has been a slight change of tune from some of the comments that have been made about the Land Bank in the past, where there has been call for repealing it immediately. I think there is a change here when they talk about consulting on the future of the Land Bank. So, I think that is quite a significant change having looked at what Members of Government and former Members of the Opposition were saying about the Land Bank, in particular. As we know for the Land Bank, for a long time, people on this side of Parliament were said to ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- What is your question?

HON. J. USAMATE.- ... not be doing things for iTaukei landowners but this one way that the Government had done in the past to try to make sure that landowners not only have assets but converted into cash. As we well know that in the Land Bank when you give your land to the Land Bank, 60 percent of people must agree, it is not taken away. When the land is given, it is surveyed for free.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Question?

HON. J. USAMATE.- My question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that we have seen from the Land Bank and now there is an opportunity for pieces of land to be leased for the purpose of making a movie for only three to six months or so. This was something that did not happen in the

past. So how have landowning units benefitted from the Land Bank as a result of movies that were shot in Fiji on areas that were given out through short-term leases through the Land Bank that were not there in the past?

MR. SPEAKER.- That was a lengthy supplementary, honourable Usamate.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, is that a supplementary question or a new question altogether? It appears to be a new question altogether, Mr. Speaker, but I think it is only fair that the honourable Member give me time for me to answer that when I get back to my office. I should be able to do that within the sitting that is scheduled this week and next week.

MR. SPEAKER.- We usually consider that, the honourable Minister needs time on that line of question that you have raised honourable Usamate.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A supplementary question, Sir. Thank you, honourable Minister for that explanation which respect to the Land Bank. Just a quick question, the Kokomo Resort, which is now one of the great 7-star resorts currently housed in Fiji, and this has actually come as a direct result of the Land Bank and it is providing 7-star accommodation to some of our tourists, as the honourable Minister for Tourism will tell you, and it provides a considerate amount of employment also to our locals. Can the honourable Minister please inform Parliament on the scale of the benefits that are actually accruing to the landowners as a result of the Land Bank making the land available for tourism?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I think that is a new question altogether. The honourable Member would be able to give me time, I should come back to you in this session of Parliament to provide the answer for that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a supplementary question. It is good to see that some honourable Members on the other side become very responsible just by crossing the floor, because there were lots of irresponsible statements made before concerning the Land Bank. My simple question to the honourable Minister is this, given the consultations that you have already alluded to, how long is it going to take and when will we expect a report to this august Parliament, given the importance of the issue before us?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I can answer. The operational mandate of the Land Bank is presently being undertaken by my Ministry. We are looking at the efficacy of the system as opposed to the system that is being run by the iTLTB. The legislative mandate, of course, they would understand that it has to come back to Parliament. If we were to repeal or propose to repeal the Act, that has to come back to Parliament and the legislative mandate will depend on how the honourable Attorney-General would want to see that being tabled in his timetable of legislative mandate in Parliament.

To answer the question, the operational mandate is currently being reviewed and I should come back to Parliament with a review on it within the next three months. But of course, the Government will then inform Parliament on what it intends to do with the Land Use Act 2010 when it makes a decision on it.

MR. SPEAKER.- That would be the last supplementary question.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Given, Land Bank was established due to the bureaucracy with iTLTB and also the difficulties in landowners developing their land because they were cash poor, although we are resource rich as *iTaukei*. From your

observation so far, after three months in office, you have stated in your answer that the Government has injected \$18 million to the Land Bank and the landowners have benefited \$11 million through various premiums and rentals. What is your observation, whether Land Bank really benefits *iTaukei* landowners and provides a better option for them than iTLTB?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question by the honourable Member, I think it started with a very bad presumption, and the presumption is that iTLTB as a leasing facility was not doing well for the landowners. We do not know whether that was the case. There was nothing that came into this Parliament that proved that. All they did was, in 2010 they introduced the Decree and suggested, “Well, let us give the landowners an alternative land use system.” Did they consult the landowners? Was there proof that they did consult the landowners? Now, what they have done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that through the enacted

HON. J. USAMATE.- \$11 million.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- There is more than \$11 million that is administered by the iTLTB; more than that, more.

HON. J. USAMATE.- (Inaudible)

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Of course, it is good. This is a State department, they are measuring \$11 million against \$18 million that was spent from treasury. It could have been administered privately by iTLTB, and that would have been the economics of it. There was in existence an iTLTB system of leasing land from the landowners. All they needed to do was to improve that system. There was no need to set up an alternative system.

Update on Fiji’s Negotiations With IPEF
(Question No. 02/2023)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on Fiji’s ongoing negotiations on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I thank honourable Vanawalu for this question on what perhaps, is one of the most important and significant negotiations Fiji has been engaged in and has the potential to unlock a myriad of trade, economic and development cooperation opportunities and benefits for our country. But before I do that, in the spirit of friendship I guess, and the desire to work together as expressed by our honourable Prime Minister, I will give credit where credit is due.

When we had the swearing in, honourable Koya in one of the breaks said to me, “Have a look at the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), make sure you do not take your eyes off IPEF”, and I actually listened to honourable Koya. Having said that, can I just balance it off with a caution to my friends on the other side. They have been saying all along, legacy, legacy and legacy and talking about the good things about what they think is their legacy. I will give them a warning now. You take the good with the bad. In this session, you will hear about the bad. Let me allow to continue, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, IPEF for prosperity was first publicly announced at the East Asia Summit in October 2021, launched later in Tokyo in May 2022 with a total of 13 participating countries that

represent 40 percent of the world's GDP and 60 percent of the world's population. The IPEF is a United States-led initiative amongst founding members which include Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam to create a new regional grouping for areas of trade, supply chains, clean and fair economy. Shortly, after the launch in May of 2022, Fiji, the first and only Pacific Island nation was invited to join IPEF to bring the membership to 14.

Following this, a series of intense virtual and physical meetings took place to establish ministerial mandates or publicly known as Ministerial Statements. The Ministerial Statements were released on 9th September, 2022. Fiji joined the United States and the other 12 partners across the Indo-Pacific Region in Los Angeles to launch IPEF Ministerial Statements on Pillar 1 which is Trade, Pillar 2 which is Supply Chains, Pillar 3 which is Clean Economy and Pillar 4 on Fair Economy. Those are the four broad pillars of the IPEF. Ministerial Statements contain broad ambitions of the IPEF initiative and forms the basis for negotiations.

It is worth noting that IPEF is not a market access agreement, therefore contains no obligations to reduce tariffs. However, it is a broad economic framework agreement that focuses on closer alignment amongst members of trade and trade-related policies and standards. For example, in Pillar 1 alone, Sir, the Trade Pillar, there are 10 specific areas of negotiations:

- (1) Agriculture;
- (2) Environment;
- (3) Digital trade;
- (4) Labour;
- (5) Transparency and good regulatory practices;
- (6) Services domestic regulation and inclusivity;
- (7) Trade facilitation;
- (8) Competition policy;
- (9) Technical assistance; and
- (10) Economic co-operation.

As we can see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the coverage of IPEF is highly technical and covers a broad range of subject matters that can have significant impact on our economies.

In response and through a Cabinet mandate, the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises has formed a technical working group, including experts from technical spheres such as the Office of the Prime Minister, the Department of Environment and the Climate Division, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries, Office of the Solicitor-General, Ministry of Communications, Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS), Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) and, obviously, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).

The first IPEF Negotiating Round was held in Brisbane in December 2022, followed by a special Negotiating Round on Pillar 2 to Pillar 4 in February 2023 in New Delhi. Just recently last week, the second full IPEF Negotiating Round was concluded in March 2023 in Bali.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that in every round, there are, at least, eight streams of negotiations taking place in parallel, and it is a seven-to-eight-day marathon of negotiations, including weekends. All the Pillars and sub-topics under the Pillars have a negotiating text.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this requires immense effort, resources and coordination and a negotiating team that comprises experts, officials and technical advisors, despite our negotiating team being small

in number compared to other parties. For example, in the last Negotiating Round in Bali, we had a team of 11 Officials, the largest delegation thus far. However, the average size of the other larger countries range from about 70, some exceeding 100. Why invest in all this effort?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, IPEF is a unique progressive framework that has sustainability, resilience and inclusive prosperity at its core. It represents immense opportunity for growth, development, integration and prosperity for all nations in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Fiji's participation in IPEF Negotiations will provide numerous tangible benefits, including increased foreign investment, enhanced trade relations and economic cooperation with other members of IPEF. Similarly, it will advance our aims under the IPEF four Pillars.

Fiji's participation in these negotiations is not a passive one, as we have had strong influence in shaping Ministerial Statements, as honourable Koya would know the negotiating guidelines, which recognises the different levels of economic development and capacity constraints across IPEF member countries and makes technical assistance and capacity building integral as part of IPEF. Sir, this is important as Ministerial Statements will guide the IPEF Negotiations.

With IPEF being a high-level ambition Agreement, we strongly believe that the commitment of flexibility, technical assistance and capacity building should continue to be engrained in our negotiations. That is why Fiji is actively contributing to the formation of the legal text during the negotiations. In this regard, we look forward to the United States and other parties' continuing support in considering Fiji's position because we are the only ones that are the voice for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the IPEF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the parties are not waiting for the negotiations to conclude in order to realise the benefits and this is one of the excellent benefits from IPEF. We acknowledge the early harvest benefits such as the upskilling and capacity building initiatives by IPEF members such as United States, Korea and Japan, which will upskill and empower Fijian women and girls in terms of using digital tools, as well as enhancing knowledge base of Fiji's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field.

In the recent Bali Rounds, Fiji with ASEAN countries presented a paper on tangible benefits, underscoring the type of benefits that could be realised under IPEF. The paper envisaged tangible benefits such as upgrade of physical infrastructure related to trade, such as ports, digital infrastructure, systems and processes and human capital.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the negotiations are moving at a rapid pace. After Bali, the third Round will be held in Singapore in May, following which the Ministers will meet as well. It is proposed that the Ministers may be able to approve in principle the conclusion of negotiations at least on one of the IPEF Pillars. It is envisaged that there will be five more rounds after May, leading up to the expected conclusion of the IPEF Negotiations in November this year.

As we can see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the parties of IPEF, including Fiji, are determined and vested with negotiating and concluding IPEF as an important vehicle to drive economic growth and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific Region. This will require a herculean effort on our part, not just by the Ministry of Trade and Cooperatives, but the whole of the Government of Fiji.

I urge all honourable Members to support Fiji's efforts and negotiations of IPEF, as this will be a monumental step forward for Fiji in terms of forging trade and economic alliance with some of the most powerful nations and economies in the world. Sir, IPEF will firmly stamp Fiji's position firmly in the greater Indo-Pacific Region.

MR. SPEAKER.- That was quite a long reply. I was about to say that honourable Premila Kumar.

The Opposition was very good in criticising the past Government for lengthy replies to questions that were raised but now, it seems that we are on that track as well. Perhaps, if I could ask that we try and concise our replies as much as possible, so it becomes a question and answer one rather than lengthy statements. But I thank you for those statements.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A supplementary question, Sir, and first of all, let me say, ‘thank you’ for the acknowledgement to the honourable Minister. I, for one, will take his side and say, “I think he actually deserved the lengthy explanation”. It is something new, something very valuable to Fiji - IPEF is a very, very important framework that needs to be dealt with carefully. So, I think the explanation being long was not really a Ministerial Statement, it just that it requires that.

My question really, just in short, honourable Minister, thank you for the very thorough explanation on that. In the last Ministerial Meeting, there was a very comprehensive Early Harvest Programme that was done with respect to our females and women entrepreneurs. I just wanted to get an update on whether that has commenced or started because of the upskilling programme that was put out by the private sector that was attached to the Ministerial Meeting? I just want to know whether we have actually are recipients of it already or there are something in training with respect to those women entrepreneurs?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the teams have visited Fiji and they will be visiting again soon to try and start the provision of the benefits. So, that is, sort of, well underway right now.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Just a quick supplementary question, in the statement, a lot of information about the negotiations which we very well understand but you also talked on potentials and opportunities. Can you clarify more on that because there are a lot of ears listening now with high expectations, whether it be in the information technology sector or whether it be in manufacturing? The reason is because I know in some of the previous arrangements that we had, while we have a lot of potentials in resource-based sectors, unfortunately, the agreements were in the other areas as well. So, that is my area of interest out of the statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I guess some of the early harvest benefits have been in the digital space and it has to do with actually start training our children for the future. I alluded to the STEM training and this is where two major companies in the world are actually coming to Fiji to introduce IT-based training. So, over the next five to 10 years, we will have a cadre of children who will be very technologically savvy, and that will sit us well in the technological space.

With regard to your question on export and potential, there are initial discussions happening with a lot of the parties that are in this agreement. I think it is fair to say that we will perhaps be realising some of the discussions that are initially starting to happen in the next six months – let us say, but I am very optimistic, Sir, with this agreement because, first, it puts Fiji at the centre of a major economic bloc, if you like and, secondly, it will allow us to play a role in terms of trying to drive more trade and more investment into Fiji.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a question to the honourable Minister; given Fiji is one of the 14 founding members of IPEF, what is the level of our engagement in the four pillars? Are we engaging negotiations in all those four pillars or only on the taxation and the anti-corruption that you have mentioned?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the engagement is across the four pillars. As you note from the Technical Committee, it includes all the disciplines that are involved in the four pillars. So, you have my assurance that we will be actively engaged across the four pillars to ensure that Fiji's voice and the rest of the Small Island Developing States' voice is actually heard at these international levels.

HON. F.S.KOYA.- Just quickly, honourable Minister, I am not sure if you are going to answer this or not but does this particular agreement have any influence or is it influenced by the geopolitics of our region?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think being led by the United States probably answers your question. It is a very significant agreement because it puts Fiji in the middle of the Indo-Pacific region and we should be thankful that, that is the case because it will just open up a lot of opportunities for the country.

There are other things that we will announce subsequently, that will make you understand why we have embraced IPEF very quickly because it does allow us to become more of a regional hub in all facets of the business, so technology, aviation and trade. So, it is a tremendous opportunity for our country and the Americans want it done this year. That is why the pace at which the negotiations is taking place is quite aggressive.

Update on the Current Inflation Rate
(Question No. 03/2023)

HON. K.K. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics update Parliament on the current inflation rate and its effect?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question regarding the inflation rate and its effect, and I think he probably means effect on consumers.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, as a government, we acknowledge the impact of inflation on Fijian consumers, businesses and other entities, especially on the consumers. High rates of inflation can have adverse effects, lower purchasing power in terms of making it more difficult for consumers to afford basic goods and services. The good news, Mr. Speaker, however, is that in February this year, inflation rate actually fell to 1.5 percent compared to 2.5 percent in January, and that is the lowest inflation since November 2021.

Mr. Speaker, inflation started increasing in March 2022 and continued to accelerate due to rising food and energy prices. Obviously, there are international movements now. We see somewhat declining international energy and food prices. For example, oil prices have dropped by about 30 percent since June 2022. Currently, it is close to about US\$80 per barrel.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of food and alcoholic beverages, tobacco, narcotics, transport, housing, water, electricity and gas, and other fuel categories, they contribute about 70 percent of the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Therefore, any price movement in those categories can significantly influence inflation rate. Price of food and non-alcoholic items rose by 3.2 percent but, Mr. Speaker, it was the lowest rise in the last 22 months. Again, that is good news in terms of what is happening to the inflation rate.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as a government, we understand the impact of inflation and components of that inflation, as I have said, 70 percent of the CPI comes from food and other alcoholic beverages, household items, et cetera. So we, as a government, need to understand. I think we are working with the Ministry of Trade and Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission.

Price control mechanism is something that people do not always like but it is an effective mechanism in circumstances, Mr. Speaker, where prices fluctuate quite significantly to ensure that there is a stable pass through within the pricing mechanism.

Mr. Speaker, that is my short answer to the question on inflation and its effect on consumers.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is related to inflation. I do note that inflation has come down but when we measure inflation, it is all about the basket of goods and, obviously, food and fuel are the two major components. My question is related to food and fuel inflation.

We have also seen that because the inflation was very high, the FijiFirst Government had exempted VAT on 21 basic consumer goods, removed fuel duty of 20 cents per litre and large scale reduction in Customs duties for thousands of products - all that was done. Now, we see that the fuel inflation is still high. The price of motor spirit and premix increased by 12 cents and gas prices increased by \$5.61.

The honourable Minister has just acknowledged the impact of inflation on consumers and businesses so my very simple question to the honourable Minister is, will he remove 20 cents fuel tax to show compassion to consumers and businesses?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, in fact, it is a very good question. The honourable Member has probably forgotten that during COVID-19 when the oil prices went down significantly, at that time a lot of people had lost jobs, a lot of people were suffering, there was loss of income and what those in Government (she was part of that Government) at that time did was they raised the 20 cents tax from 44 cents to 66 cents. After we, in the Opposition, made a big song and dance about it and we called on the Government to reduce the 20 cents, then they reduced it from 66 percent to 44 percent. Now, she is asking whether we are going to reduce it further by 20 percent.

I have just said, Mr. Speaker, if she had listened carefully, that there is an international trend now, declining fuel prices and food prices. Any decision on those, of course, will be taken in, but it is actually quite hilarious that they were part of the Government which actually increased the tax by 20 cents at a time when people were suffering, when people needed help and when businesses needed help.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You never answered my question.

MR. SPEAKER.- I like that part of *bhatao, bhatao*.

(Laughter)

The mover of the question is wanting to raise his supplementary question.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for giving that brief. I think he should have known that better before promising people \$5 lamb chops during the campaign period.

My supplementary question is; the purchasing power of all citizens had significantly decreased and businesses are in turmoil. Food prices are high, and we understand the problems around the world that have caused this. But what Fiji wants to know is, what is your Government doing and what measures are being put in place to counteract this?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Member, before asking that question, he talked about \$5 minimum wages. We promised that in 2018.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me just say this, the honourable Member forgot that in 2018, he was making videos and going on the social media and supporting the National Federation Party and our promise to bring \$5 wages. So, something happened, and I know what happened.

HON. K.K. LAL.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. You sit down. I have a Point of Order.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What Order!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 60 - Speech must be relevant. Standing Order 60(1) states, and I quote: "When speaking, members must confine their observations to the subject..."

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You mentioned the \$5.

HON. K.K. LAL.- I am talking about inflation. What you are talking about is not inflation.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- No running commentary, please.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, my advice to the honourable Member is, before he opens his mouth, he should think of what he is going to say. He talked about \$5 and that was my response.

HON. P.K. BALA.- \$5 for what?

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me explain, Mr. Speaker, on what the Government has done under the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister.

In the first 30 days just before the school opened, we released that a lot of families and students throughout the country were struggling, incomes slowly restored, but there were a lot of families out there. And the Government, under the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister, decided that we would pay \$200 per child, called Back to School Support.

Mr. Speaker, we supported more than 214,000 students in this country. You go and talk to all the parents, families and friends. You ask the honourable Minister for Education on the number of parents and families who have come out and said how important, critical and timely that

announcement was by the honourable Prime Minister and the support by the Government to all their families. They do not talk about that, Mr. Speaker.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We're supporting everyone.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we allocated an additional \$7.5 million to continue the 10 percent reduction in bus fares for additional six months from February to July.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Where is the money from?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, unlike them who kept borrowing, we are looking at the budget. We found the money in the budget that they did. So, Sir, this is a Government which understands much better.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Tell them!

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- He is an economist.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-The honourable Minister for Lands, Mr. Speaker, just taught them some simple economics. They do not understand that because they were cheerleaders for a non-economist who was trying to run this country.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, let me assure the people of this country that the Government is fully committed to ensuring that we develop programmes and policies that are timely ones, not during election, to support our families and those who are in need.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will have to move on. I intend to adjourn the House now so that honourable Members will be able to serve themselves dinner that is being provided in the Big Committee Room. We have been holding on to this very lengthy meeting and as such, dinner has been provided. We will resume once the bell is sounded. I adjourn Parliament.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.22 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.31 p.m.

Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Assistance
(Question No. 04/2023)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the humanitarian and disaster relief assistance provided to New Zealand and Vanuatu after the recent severe tropical cyclones?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question asked by the honourable Alitia Bainivalu to provide an update on the recent humanitarian and disaster relief assistance provided to New Zealand and Vanuatu after the recent severe tropical cyclone events.

On the New Zealand Response, Sir, allow me to provide an update. First for the New Zealand deployment, during severe *TC Gabrielle* which hit the North Island of New Zealand with damages estimated to be at least \$13 billion. It caused significant impacts to the northern and eastern parts of North Island including Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Tairāwhiti, Hawkes Bay and Tairārua. New Zealand declared a National State of Emergency on the 14th February, 2023. It was only the third time in New Zealand's history they have a national emergency with a number of 11 fatalities recorded, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from 2017 till to-date, New Zealand's support towards Fiji disaster management has been to the tune of over \$7 million. The Government's decision to reciprocate this assistance was received with much gratitude by the Government and the people of New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 20th February, 2023, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) briefed the honourable Prime Minister on what Fiji could offer. A subsequent Cabinet Paper was also submitted with the following proposal with NDMO with five personnel comprising of emergency management specialist, RFMF with 26 personnel comprising of infantry and engineering platoon led by a Navy Lieutenant Commander and assisted by an RFMF Captain. The RFMF team liaised closely with the New Zealand Defence Force team. From the National Fire Authority (NFA), we had three personnel. They offered three officers who were specialists in search and rescue operations to assist in the response effort at the Hawkes Bay Emergency Services. A total of 34 personnel from the Government of Fiji's Humanitarian Assistance team to New Zealand and departed on 24th February, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the distribution of tasks, the five NDMO officials were embedded with the New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency, based at their national coordination centre in Wellington. The officials were deployed for 14 days. The three NFA officials were embedded with the New Zealand Emergency Services team in Napier, Hawkes Bay and officials were deployed for 14 days. The 26 RFMF officials were embedded with the New Zealand Defence Force based at Hawkes Bay which was the worst affected region in New Zealand. The officials were deployed for 28 days and they have just returned last Saturday and we owe them a vote of gratitude for all the good work they have done. The budget and logistics, Sir, the total budget for the deployment of the Government of Fiji team to New Zealand was \$184,900. The New Zealand Government provided the strategic air lift, food and accommodation to the Fiji Emergency Response Team.

For the Vanuatu deployment Sir, as part of our Pacific family initiative, the Coalition Government also responded to Vanuatu after the island was hit by two consecutive Category 4

Cyclones - *TC Judy* and *TC Kevin*. It caused massive destruction to the vegetation and livestock and on the 5th March, 2023, their Prime Minister announced that the whole of Vanuatu was under a state of emergency through a declaration of a State of Emergency.

The honourable Prime Minister whilst he was in Panama at that time, communicated his advice to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the permanent representative of Fiji to reach out to key stakeholders to coordinate Fiji's support to Vanuatu. Consequently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs convened a multi-stakeholder committee meeting on Monday, 6th March, 2023 to discuss Fiji's support to Vanuatu to complement their ongoing relief and response efforts for *TC Judy* and *TC Kevin*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji managed to offer the following:

- RFMF officials which includes engineers and medical experts - 40;
- Fiji Emergency Medical Assistants Team (FEMAT) by the Ministry of Health for surge support to hospitals - 9;
- NDMO officials which were facilitated coordinating support for Government of Fiji's deployment in Vanuatu - 5; and
- Food, rations and water.

On 7th March, 2023, the Vanuatu Government accepted Fiji's offer through a diplomatic note.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge our partners who also joined Government in supporting our Melanesian family. This includes Fiji Airways, Fiji Water, Pleass Global Limited, 4GEN Steelform Pte Limited, Fiji Pine Group of Companies, Food Processors (Fiji) Limited, Bhikabhai & Company Proprietary Limited, Ba Industries Proprietary Limited, Fiji Rice (Pte) Limited and the World Food Programme. It is important to note that the Pacific region needs a strong whole of society approach towards humanitarian work that can bring our different communities together.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the total budget for the deployment was \$583,841 and I would like to acknowledge the New Zealand Government and again providing airlift for the second contingency team with the host country providing accommodation for the Emergency Response Team. The team is currently deployed for 28 days and updates up to now, Sir, since the team is still in Vanuatu, I wish to inform the Members of this august Parliament on some of the work they have conducted and are currently doing in Vanuatu. They are providing surge support to the Vanuatu National Emergency Coordination Centre, they are delivering ration packs and water to severely affected areas and the RFMF has conducted a quick fix on the Vila SDA School that was instrumental in the re-opening of that school on Monday, 27th March, 2023.

The team also joined up with the Fiji Field Ready Team to assist the WASH cluster with installation of sanitation systems. Our FEMAT team has also been assigned to Mele Village and will be working with the respective clusters in responding to the recovery needs of Mele Village.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been a spike in leptospirosis, typhoid, dengue fever and diarrhoea cases in the country and has recorded its first death this past week from leptospirosis.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these assistance and regional deployments are aligned well to our regional cooperation strategy outlined in the Boe Declaration of Regional Security where member states are encouraged to assist each other during humanitarian crisis. Both humanitarian response deployment fulfils Fiji's obligations under the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy also affirms Fiji's position as a leader in the region in inter-regional assistance for disasters and also

emergencies.

HON. V. NATH.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Minister mentioned in one of the recent media statements some legacy issues that the Ministry will need to fix regarding information and advisory on the general public. Can you please clarify and be more specific on this legacy issue?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I am not quite clear on what the question is. Can you please clarify what the question is again, honourable Member?.

MR. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat the supplementary question?

HON. V. NATH.- It is a supplementary question. Recently in the media you mentioned that you were exercising a legacy. You had quoted that you were going to fix and provide some information and advice to the general public. Can you clarify and be specific on what advice you are talking about?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I fail to see the question there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I do not believe that there is anything to answer.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vijay Nath, the honourable Minister has replied that his not clear even though you have repeated the question.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What is the subject matter?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister in one of his recent media statements mentioned of some legacy issue that the Ministry will need to fix regarding information and advisory on the general public. That is what I am asking, can you clarify and be more specific on this legacy?

MR. SPEAKER.- Can you re-submit that later on honourable Vijay Nath as a new question?

HON. V. NATH.- Noted, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Supplementary question. Honourable Minister, in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, a common vision for our Pacific Leaders is also for a very resilient Pacific region, a region of peace, harmony, security and social inclusion and prosperity. One of the key thematic areas, honourable Minister is actually climate change and disasters under which resilience is listed as an actual strategic pathway under this particular thematic area. What role, honourable Minister can Fiji play under this particular thematic area in terms of regional cooperation and collaboration to strengthen the resilience of all our communities?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I will try to answer that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are signatory to the Sendai Framework. I have just been to one of the conferences in that area and the disaster resilience work that we are doing will be our mid-term review that is going to be reported in New York later in May. I believe that is going to be part of the discussions that we are going to have in the future.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick supplementary question. Thank you, honourable Minister, you have highlighted how we are responding to New Zealand and to the region in terms of severe tropical cyclones and how we are providing humanitarian assistance. But back to Fiji, given there are recent floods and other things, how are we responding? We are not mobilising as quick as we are organising ourselves overseas than what we are facing here in Fiji. What measures

have been put in place to improve things as we move forward in response to our local weather events?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a brief on the flooding incidents that happened lately in the Northern and Western Divisions. On 3rd February, 2023, the National Emergency Centre in the Northern Division, EOC's were activated to monitor the heavy rain warning issued. Sir, 80 Evacuation Centres were opened, 350 evacuees were helped. The evacuation should be commended for being proactive, moving early to the Evacuation Centres.

I would also like to thank our partners, the Red Cross, the Labasa faith-based organisations and partners for their assistances rendered to our evacuees. I would like to remind this august Parliament that the rules on 48-hour food rations to occupants of these evacuation centres were put in place by the previous Government and is currently under review. We are reviewing the existing policies in places to ensure easy access and fast delivery of services to the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, heavy rain warnings were again monitored by the National and Divisional EOC's on 17th February, 2023 and in light of the adverse weather conditions experienced, the Ministry of Education advised schools to close and Permanent Secretaries to allow non-essential civil service to take early leave. This was part of our preparedness effort to ensure safety for all. During this event, there were two Evacuation Centres opened with five households, 21 evacuees in the Western Division. All Evacuation Centres were closed by 19th February, 2023, less than 48 hours of its opening. I can give you a more detailed breakdown if you want more.

On 7th March, 2023 due to the effects of *TC Kevin*, the Western Division EOC's were activated to monitor the adverse weather conditions. No evacuation centre was opened, however, 32 families were impacted by floodwater upon the Commissioner of Western Team field visit while waiting for the Ministry of Agriculture to conduct an initial damage assessment, the Commissioner Western mobilised its community partnership watch and worked with our friend from the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND) to provide food ration to these affected families. Again, the breakdown is available, and we can give them to you if you need them.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his answers. I think all of us as part of the Pacific fraternity appreciate the assistance that was given to our friends in New Zealand and also to our Melanesian cousins in Vanuatu. I am glad to see that the Ministry is still taking this further, I think the legacy issue that the former Assistant Minister Nath was talking about, the legacy issues was related to the ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What is the question?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Coming.

... relationship between Fiji Meteorological and NDMO in giving the advance warnings because they are in different ministries. But I think what has happened now, that is more not a real legacy issue, but it is a matter of coordination between the two different ministries.

The issue that I wanted to bring up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that over the past few years, we have developed this new facility called the Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) which has been useful. We were probably the ninth nation in the world to develop this, the first of the small island countries, we were accredited by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and that was one example of the things that were done to prepare ourselves for disasters. We also developed the warehouses, so my question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FEMAT was it also involved in this exercise that was carried out in Vanuatu and New Zealand and what are your plans for further building up this capacity of providing assistance through FEMAT?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, FEMAT was part of the team in Vanuatu, it was not sent to New Zealand though. It is part of the future planning for the Ministry, we are going to be developing strategies on developing our National Emergency Response Teams (NERT). That is going to be part of what will be submitted to Cabinet shortly. I think Solomon Islands is the only island nation in the Pacific that has developed its NERT capacity at the moment. Fiji is working very closely with its agencies to try and develop the RFMF, Fiji Police, NFA and other teams like FEMAT to try and develop SOPs and procedures on how we will progress that so that we can be readily available to call upon them when we need them, both for local intervention as well as the regional.

Cane Price Per Tonne of Sugarcane
(Question No. 05/2023)

HON. P.K. BALA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on what cane price will cane farmers get per tonne of sugarcane in the next season?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question by honourable Bala. My response will be very short and simple.

I have just been appointed as a Minister for Sugar Industry, it is nearly three months now. I want to share what has been discovered in the sugar industry with this Parliament. To begin with, I wish to thank all the sugar stakeholders including the cane farmers who were sharing their issues honestly and openly with me. So far, I have held a number of meetings with all sugar industry institutions and visited all its facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have also visited the cane growers and made numerous field visits, whereby, I gained first-hand knowledge and opportunity to see how growers were suffering due to lack of infrastructure and waterlogged farms. The infilled drains were almost invisible with infested weeds, overgrown plants and grass. With these waterlogged farms, the cane plants were stranded and will not grow as it is supposed to be thus impact on cane production and yield.

The farms are dominated only by ratoon crops with more than 10 years of age with barely 5 percent of planted cane.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Answer the question.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I will come to that.

The ratoon crops are not yielding outputs as expected and the productivity is below 50 tonnes per hectare for a very long time. Monocropping is the key result for depleted soil health cleaning almost all under cane into the acidic soil.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rail networks have almost disappeared in some areas while the rail carts are in bad shape causing frequent derailments. Many of the productive and hardworking growers are paid same as those providing lower cane quality. There have been incentives for them to work harder and it will improve.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Answer the question.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Yes. No proper attention was given to the growers on how to support them in reducing the production cost. This would have significantly reduced the cost and increased

the overall income of key farmers interested in the sugar cane. For decades, FSC has been producing only one product and that is sugar. There has been no diversification as those of other sugar producing countries. The actual cream of the cake is being enjoyed by the overseas buyers who take our sugar, refine it and sell it at a premium price, making huge profits through our hard work.

We need to add value here in Fiji. Issues identified by many, I will not speak more but provide my response to the question by honourable Bala. Currently, my Ministry is working on a new plan with budget requirements for 2023-2024 financial year. Therefore, the Ministry will continue with the budget allocated to it in 2022-2023 financial year. So my answer is, the growers will be paid \$85 a tonne for this year, and this is what I have told the growers and stakeholders in all my meetings.

The third cane payment for the 2022 season, which is \$24.62 per tonne, the highest compared to previous payments will be made. I will not reveal any further details about what will happen in 2023-2024 financial year budget as the process has not been completed and it is impulsive to make any speculation what will be paid next season. Let the People's Coalition Government do its work with proper planning, well-reasoned ideas and thorough inclusive consultation that will concern stakeholders for the sugar industry and complete our budget for 2023-2024.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Supplementary question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if that is the case, then when the Government will implement the increased guaranteed minimum cane price as promised during the election campaign?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Who promised?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Just get up and say what for the budget.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Wait for the budget, honourable Bala. No one promised.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Wait for the budget.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was part (a). Now,(b), is it true that the sales of truck, which I have highlighted in the last session, have been put on hold and if, yes, then why?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Too many questions.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- That is totally a new question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Too many questions.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You are only asking about the sugar price, that is it.

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- One at a time.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have raised two questions, honourable Bala. One is about trucks and the other one is about the sugar price.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not want to create this Chamber into the function that was held in New Zealand.

(Laughter)

That is exactly what he is trying to do here. I am asking you and you have to answer as a Minister. You cannot run away.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have answered....

HON. P.K. BALA.- Can you sit down?

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- I will now take honourable Seruiratu's question.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- *Baitho, baitho.*

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said in the last Parliament, it is a matter of interest and that relates to what he has just said. Is it true that the sales of truck have been put on hold and if yes, then why? It is a simple question.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- If you do not know the answer, say so.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is totally a new question and if he wants the answer, he submits a new question.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will go back to the original question. You would recall when we had the Business Committee Meeting, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, who unfortunately is not here, wanted us to clarify whether it was the current season's price or the next season's price, and that is why this question is appearing and has been raised. So the simple question again, he is not committing which is disappointing. What will be the price per tonne of sugar or cane in the next season? That is the original question that you are avoiding, honourable Member.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$85 is guaranteed now. For the next budget, once the next budget comes out, you will get a new figure.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- I do not want to ask anything, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Do not go.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Rubbish!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- *Areh!*

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament if the subsidies on fertiliser, chemicals and the assistance towards land preparation, sugar cane planting and the subsidised rates on machinery will continue as it was during FijiFirst?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again the honourable Member should understand that

this was about the price of sugar. His question can be asked at some other time.

2022-2023 Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme
(Question No. 06/2023)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the informal settlements that will be upgraded under the Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme in the 2022-2023 financial year?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question that has been posed by the honourable Member. The rural to urban migration is one of the primary reasons for the increase of informal settlements in our urban and semi-urban areas. Informal settlements have become a major feature in Fiji's urban life for the past 40 years to 50 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme is an in-situ capital programme that intends to improve the housing standards of people living in informal settlements across our nation. These programmes give priority to the provision of basic services such as water, waste water, drainage, road, electricity and a functional tenure through issuance of 99-year lease titles to eligible settlers. The Ministry continues to carry out upgrades to informal settlements through progressive planning and preparation works that will minimise disturbance of the day-to-day activities of settlers.

In the last financial year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has completed three informal settlements. Unfortunately, honourable Bala is not here - Waidamudamu in Nausori, Ledrusasa in Nadi and Cuvu in Sigatoka with a total investment of more than \$11 million. Even though the three projects were completed, it took a bit of time for the Ministry to complete these projects. Waidamudamu took close to five years, Ledrusasa nearly seven years and Cuvu eight years. With the completion of upgrades, we are working to finalise royalty works of the issuance of 99 years lease titles that will benefit 451 households in the three settlements. This has been long awaited by the settlers and we will make it our priority to issue the lease titles they rightfully deserve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, preparation works for the upgrades of our informal settlements goes through various phases. The preparation phases include topographic surveys, scheme plans, environmental impact assessments, geotech surveys and engineering plans. At the completion of these phases, construction works then commence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2022-2023 financial year, two informal settlements have commenced construction works. These are Sakoca in Nasinu which accommodates 174 households and Tabela in Nadi accommodates 68 households. The total project cost for the upgrades in these informal settlements amounts to \$9.9 million out of which \$5.9 million is for Sakoca and \$4 million for Tabela. The third informal settlement that is lined up to commence construction work in April is Field 4 in Lautoka which has 77 households at a total project cost of \$5.3 million. So, at the end of the upgrade, a total of 319 households will have access to fully serviced subdivided lots with access to basic utility services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 10 settlements that are in preparation phase this financial year, four settlements have reached tendered documentation phase and will be earmarked to commence construction works. These areas include Tore, Lovu Seaside, Nabare and Delaisaweni Settlements in Lautoka. The total project cost of the upgrades of these settlements amounts to a tune of \$38 million that will be made progressively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the remaining six Settlements - Valewaquyaya in Ba, Vunika in Labasa, Caubati and Wakanisila in Nasinu, Sasawira in Nausori and Nadonumai in Lami have had their scheme plans completed and will be progressing to have their engineering plans completed by this financial year. The total project cost for the upgrades in these settlements is nearly \$42 million which is an investment that will also be made progressively. The Ministry had acquired two additional development leases in the financial year for Valenimasima in Nadi and Sakoca too in Nasinu. The Ministry currently has a total of 48 development leases, out of these, four settlements are on State land and 44 are on *iTaukei* land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon acquiring these development leases, the Ministry pays for the lease premium and yearly ground rentals. This financial year we have paid close to \$123,000 in lease premiums for the two new development leases and more than \$110,000 for ground rental and renewal of lease. This process has benefitted both landowners and settlers in these informal settlements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to work with and not against informality and ensure that the livelihoods and economic opportunities for those living in informal settlements are forwarded through the informal settlement upgrade programme.

The upgrading and formalization of informal settlements supports Fiji's Progress Towards Achieving one of the SDGs that was alluded earlier by honourable Seruiratu, in this case it is SDG11 for making cities and urban settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable with a target of ensuring access for all to adequate safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade informal settlements by 2030.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Member for his response to the question. It is quite interesting sitting this side and listening to the response because that is precisely what we did. There is nothing new and I understand because the question was for the 2022-2023 financial year. So, everything he has said is what we have done...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is your question?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Of course, I am coming to the question. That is exactly what we have done and the reason why I am emphasizing this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because when I used to tell them what we were doing, they refused to believe, and I hope they will believe now what the Member has said. My question is, what are the challenges the Ministry is facing when it comes to in-situ development?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my response, I mentioned that one of the three projects that will be completed this year is Waidamudamu. It started way back in 2017, I remember I attended that groundbreaking ceremony.

For the upgrading of informal settlements, as alluded to by the former Minister, it is about upgrading of in-situ capital developments. What that actually means is that, it is something that is different from a normal sub-division. Like when there is a parcel of land, there is no development on site, there is no settlement on the site. So, in this case, the Ministry is trying to formalise settlements that have already been resided or occupied by settlers. It takes time for the consultants - the draughtsman, to actually come up with a scheme plan, they have to try and come up with a plan so that it accommodates everyone in that settlement. So, the scheme plan will take time, I understand some of the reasons why some of these projects were delayed because when the settlers went in, there was no scheme plan ready. So, these are some of the things that the Ministry faces, it actually gets the scheme plan done, gets the engineering plans done and the survey plan approved before we actually give out the land leases to all the settlers.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Minister has been like a breath of fresh air.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- These are exactly the things that we have been explaining in Parliament these past few years, so as I always invited you, come into the light, finally you are coming into the light. I just have one question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, can you just give us an update on Qauia?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can see me holding one of the plans that the Ministry has drawn up including all the settlements that we are intending to do this year. Qauia is one of the settlements that we are targeting to also see this year. Qauia is a big area. If you have been to Qauia, one portion of Qauia is a flood prone area, so these are some of the things that we need to consider before we actually go in and formalise the Qauia settlement. On your question, honourable Member, the Ministry is in the process of considering Qauia in one of our future project developments for informal settlements.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, as everyone is aware when a development lease is acquired, the sitting tenants do not pay any kind of rental. Recently there are news that there are certain landowners, not all, who are actually asking the sitting tenants to pay rental. Is the Ministry aware of this? If it is happening, what is the Ministry actually doing to stop this?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you for the question, honourable Member. I think the question is not related to the question that I have been asked to respond to this evening. But as far as I am concerned, I have not received any complaints or queries from current residents regarding payments that are done to the landlords. If there are issues, please feel free to forward those queries to my office.

Our Ocean Conference - Panama
(Question No. 07/2023)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs inform Parliament on the positive outcomes of Our Ocean Conference in Panama?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question.

We all know that positive outcomes from international conferences take time to materialise. Honourable Members of this Parliament know that international conferences such as the “Our Ocean Conference” that the honourable Ravunawa is asking about which was held in Panama City between the 2nd and 3rd March, 2023 was a part of a series of talks and meetings and conferences that I thought began in 1992 but in fact it began in 1972 in Europe. We had sent our Minister for Urban Development, Housing and Climate Change at the time and these conferences come up with all sorts of things that we later develop into our development policies.

Sir, the recent one in Panama was the Our Ocean Conference. The short answer to the question, is that we are expecting US\$1.695 billion in Green Climate Funds which will go towards the Fiji Urban Water Supply and Wastewater Management Project, some will go to the Fiji Agrophotovoltaic Project in Bureta, Ovalau, a Global Subnational Climate Fund (Technical Assistance Facility), Global Subnational Climate Fund (Equity), Global Fund for Coral Reefs

Investment window enhancing direct access to climate finance in Fiji Phase One and enhancing direct access to climate finance in Fiji Phase Two.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be presenting a very detailed Ministerial Statement after the presentation of my report to Cabinet tomorrow. Basically, the outcomes of that conference are those that I have read out and we do not take all the credit because a lot of these discussions had happened before we were elected in, but we found also that there are catch-up legislations which we have to put in place.

As the climate change champion will know, we need to put in place those legislations that make us compliant with the international expectation for those that are going to be receiving these funds and contributing to the reduction of global warming as the national champion had said - 1.5 Degrees target. That tries to get the world back to pre-industrial standards or temperatures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will take supplementary questions, but I will also present a Ministerial Statement later on in the Sitting.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is the eighth Oral Question for today and it is under honourable Sakiusa Tubuna who is not available. Normally, the question lapses when the author is not available.

I have noticed that the former Speaker entertained this, but I want to ask the honourable Members, are we going to be entertaining this because honourable Isikeli Tuiwailevu is readily available to ask that question, but I would like the honourable Members to decide on that. If it moves on, the question lapses.

HON. MEMBERS.- We move on.

MR. SPEAKER.- So, we will move on.

(Oral Question No. 08/2023 lapses)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I have a clarification being sought, I think this might benefit everyone in Parliament with respect to the written questions. So, just a quick clarification. The question that is being asked in terms of Written Question, the dates on it, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Question 9(b) is actually the period January 2005 to 16th September, 2021. This does not correlate with the financial years. I think they may want to amend it to put it within the financial years so that we can all get a proper answer for the financial year reporting time.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I think, honourable Koya is a Member of the Business Committee. This was not raised in the Business Committee and the questions have passed so I think it should not be allowed to be asked unless the honourable Member right now wishes to amend on the floor as requested and covers the whole financial year, then that can be done here. But as far as the Business Committee is concerned, it had passed and it is here on the Order Paper, and that we should proceed.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am not even sure. We are all interested in the answer, but I am not sure how they are actually going to report it because there is a reference to annual reports. It is just a date change.

If they want to move to change it here that is fine, Sir, as long as they fit it in within the financial period because there are no reports specific to any other period. It is specific to an annual report and these particular dates that have been mentioned January 2005 to 16th September, 2021, how does that work, Sir, it does not. We do not have any objection to an amendment been made on

the floor with respect to the dates to suit the financial years.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament has already stated that we will go by what has been discussed in the Business Committee and that stands.

Written Questions

Remuneration, Allowances and Entitlements– RFMF Commanders
(Question No. 09/2023)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I hear what the honourable Koya has said in relation to section (b) but the question, as cleared by the Business Committee, is as follows:

Can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration:

- (a) Update Parliament on the remuneration, allowances and all entitlements of former RFMF Commanders from the year January 2005 to 16th September, 2021;
- (b) The rate of return of RFMF Annual Reports for the period January 2005 to 16th September, 2021 as per legal requirements then and now, for tabling in Parliament?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for her written¹ question. I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Fiji Diplomatic and Official Passports
(Question No. 10/2023)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration update Parliament on:

- (a) Who can hold a Fiji diplomatic passport and who qualifies to have an official Fiji passport and who authorizes the issuance of such passports;
- (b) How many Fiji diplomatic passports were issued from 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December, 2022 – for whom and for what purposes;
- (c) How many Fiji official passports were issued from 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December, 2022 – for whom and for what purposes;
- (d) How many former Cabinet Ministers and other persons who were issued a Fiji diplomatic or official passport from the period 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December, 2022 have surrendered the same after relinquishing the office they held and how many have not;
- (e) How many of the Executive Civil Servants who have been suspended or sent on leave with or without pay or have any form of investigations currently in process presently hold Fiji diplomatic or official passports and when will they return the same to the official authority;
- (f) How many Fiji diplomatic and official passports issued from 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December, 2022 have been reported as destroyed, stolen or missing; and
- (g) What action (if any) under the current law does the Department of Immigration intend to take upon the retrieval of Fiji diplomatic and official passports from persons who no longer qualify to use the same for travel or identification purpose?

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 09/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for her question. I² will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today in terms of the items that are before us for discussion. I thank you all for your contributions.

Parliament is now adjourned until Wednesday, 29th March, 2023 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.27 p.m.

² Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 10/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

ANNEXURE I

-Reply to Written Question No. 09/2023 Tabled on Wednesday, 5th April, 2023 by the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, honourable P. Tikoduadua (Ref. Page 458)



Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration
Honourable Pio Tikoduadua

**RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTION 09/2023 (A) BY
HON. LENORA QEREQERETABUA**

Can the Minister update the Parliament on the remuneration, allowances and all entitlements of former RFMF Commanders from the years January 2005 to 16 September 2021?

BACKGROUND

During the last Parliamentary Sitting on Monday 27th March, 2023 the Assistant Minister for Housing and Local Government Hon Lenora Qereqeretabua asked the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, Hon Pio TIKODUADUA for the remuneration, allowances and all entitlements of former RFMF Commanders from the years January 2005 to 16 September 2021.

Reasons for brief. This brief is written to provide Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua a response to her question in Parliament.

Scope of brief. This brief will explain in detail the number of Officers that have held the position of Commander RFMF from the period January 2005 to 16 September 2021 and the range of remuneration held by the Commanders from this period. The brief will also explain other allowances and entitlements received by former Commanders.

Prior to the current Commander of the RFMF Major General Ro Jone Kalouniwai, three commanders held the leadership position in the RFMF. The former Prime Minister Rear Admiral Voreqe Bainimarama held the position of Commander RFMF from 2005 to 04 March 2014, Brigadier Mosese Tikoitoga held the position of Commander from 5 March 2014 to July 2015. Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto acted in the position of Commander RFMF from August 2015 to February 2016 prior to being appointed as the Commander RFMF in March 2016.

**RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTION 09/2023 (B) BY
HON. LENORA QEREQERETABUA**

The rate of return of RFMF Annual Reports for the period January 2005 to 16 September 2021 as per legal requirement/s then and now, for tabling in Parliament.

BACKGROUND

During the last Parliamentary Sitting on Monday 27th March, 2023 the Assistant Minister for Housing and Local Government Hon Lenora Qereqeretabua asked the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, Hon Pio TIKODUADUA *for the rate of return of RFMF Annual Reports for the period January 2005 to 16 September 2021 as per legal requirement/s then and now, for tabling in Parliament.*

Reasons for brief. This brief is written to provide Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua a response to her question in Parliament.

The Ministry has noted the past request for the tabling of the RFMF's Annual Report in Parliament and as the Minister responsible for the Forces, I wish to highlight in this August House that I will endeavour to have the RFMF reports table during my term of office. I acknowledge that the delay in the submission of the reports was change in leadership and staff rotation within the headquarters attributed in the hold up in the compilation of the reports.

Currently my Ministry has received the Annual Report for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 which will be tabled to Cabinet. The RFMF is in the process of retrieving and collating the annual reports from 2005 to 2018. Given the massive task to compile the reports from this period, I have been given the assurance by the Commander of the RFMF that these Annual reports will be submitted and tabled to a later date.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 10/2023 Tabled on Wednesday, 5th April, 2023 by the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, honourable P. Tikoduadua (Ref. Page: 458-459)



**Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration
Honourable P. Tikoduadua**

**RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTION NO. 10/2023 BY
HON. LENORA QEREQERETABUA**

Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua to ask the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration –

- (a) Who can hold a Fiji diplomatic passport and who qualifies to have an official Fiji passport and who authorises the issuance of such passports?

RESPONSE:

- (i) **Fiji Diplomatic Passport**

The Diplomatic passport ensures that diplomatic obligations are accorded to diplomats and guided by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities Act (1971).

The Fiji Immigration Department provides Immigration services through the administration and enforcement of the Immigration Act 2003 and Regulations; Passport Act 2002 and Regulations; Citizenship Act 2009 and Regulations.

Cabinet decision on September 1973 (*as Annex 1*) that Fiji Diplomatic Passports should be given to:

- (a) Heads of Fiji's overseas missions and their wives, but not their children (unless they travel on the father's or mother's passport)
- (b) Members of the diplomatic staff of Fiji's overseas missions, who are citizens of Fiji; and
- (c) Cabinet Ministers and their wives travelling abroad on Government business, on the condition that they relinquish such passports when they are no longer Cabinet Ministers.

Furthermore, Cabinet Decision on July 1986 (*as Annex 2*) makes further amendment agreed that the present list be amended to include:

- (a) Ministers of State and their spouse;
- (b) Chief Justice and spouse;
- (c) Speaker of the House of Representatives and spouse;

- (d) President of the Senate and spouse;
- (e) Leader of the Opposition and spouse;
- (f) Ombudsman and spouse.

(ii) Official Fiji passport

Pursuant to Passport (Amendment) Act 2016, Act No 14 of 2016, Section 9(A)(1) a Passport Officer, upon receipt of an application made in the approved form (*as Annex 3*).

The Official passport applications are endorsed by the Commander of the Republic Fiji Military Forces, Commissioner of Fiji Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Services as may be, issue to a member of the disciplined forces travelling on peacekeeping duties.

(iii) Who authorises the issuance of such passports?

The issuance of Diplomatic passport is authorise by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whereas the Official passport is authorise by the Commander of the Republic Fiji Military Forces, Commissioner of Fiji Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections in accordance with their respective assessment criteria whilst the Department of Immigration facilitate the issuance of both passports.

- (b) How many Fiji diplomatic passports were issued from 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December 2022 – to whom and for what purposes?

RESPONSE:

The number of Diplomatic Passports varies in each year depend on the number of applications received and assessed by the authorising authority. Diplomatic Passports were issued to officers, as the Cabinet decision. Additionally, it was also issued to Civil Servants under the Fiji's Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities Act (1971).

A total of 308 diplomatic passports were issued from the reporting period, 5th December 2006 to 23rd December 2022, the list is as *Annex 4*. Tabulated below are summary of Diplomatic Passports issued:

DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT ISSUED_BY YEAR	
YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF PASSPORT ISSUED
2006	15
2007	17
2008	21
2009	10
2010	12
2011	22
2012	23
2013	15
2014	23

2015	26
2016	25
2017	21
2018	30
2019	17
2020	7
2021	4
2022	20
TOTAL	308

Source: Immigration, Integrated Border Management System

- (c) How many Fiji official passports were issued from 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December, 2022 – to whom and for what purposes?

RESPONSE:

The Act No. 14 of 2016, Section 9(A)(1) a Passport Officer may, upon receipt of an application endorsed by the Commander of the Republic Fiji Military Forces, Commissioner of Fiji Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections as may be, issue a Fijian passport to a member of the disciplined forces travelling on peacekeeping duties.

The Fiji Immigration Department commenced the issuance of official passport in 2019. Tabulated below are the total number of official passport issued on each year from period 2019 to 2023.

OFFICIAL PASSPORT ISSUED BY YEAR: 2019-2023	
YEAR	TOTAL
2019	117
2020	37
2021	545
2022	554
2023	126
TOTAL	1,379

Source: Immigration, Integrated Management Border System

- (d) How many former Cabinet Ministers and other persons who were issued a Fiji diplomatic or official passport from the period 5th December, 2006 to 23rd December, 2022 have surrendered the same after relinquishing the office they held and how many have not?

RESPONSE:

According to the records all diplomatic and official passports have been surrendered after relinquishing the office. The passports have been deactivated and surrendered at the border upon travelling. On the same note, the list of diplomatic passport holder were

revised in January 2023.

- (e) How many of the Executive Civil Servants who have been suspended or sent on leave with or without pay or have any form of investigations currently in process, presently hold Fiji diplomatic or official passports, and when will they return the same to the official authority?

RESPONSE:

For those who no longer qualify to hold official or diplomatic passport, their passports are deactivated, confiscated and enlisted on the watchlist for security purposes.

- (f) How many Fiji diplomatic and official passports issued from 5 December 2006 to 23 December 2022 have been reported as destroyed, stolen or missing.

RESPONSE:

From December 2006 to 23 December 2022, 5 diplomatic passports were reported as destroyed, stolen or missing and no report received from official passports.

In case, for passports being destroyed, stolen or missing the holder may apply for the renewal however, they are required to meet the conditions and pay the applicable fee. The List of Lost Diplomatic passports is as *Annex 5*.

- (g) What action (if any) under the current law does the Department of Immigration intend to take upon the retrieval of Fiji diplomatic and official passports from persons who no longer qualify to use the same for travel or identification purpose?

RESPONSE:

The diplomatic and official passports would be relinquished when the office bearers vacate office. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the relevant disciplinary forces shall advise and submit the amended list to Immigration Department, the records are updated accordingly in the system.

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CP(1973): 23rd Meeting

Date: 05/09/1973

CABINET DECISION

Wednesday 5 September 1973

202. Diplomatic Passport – FA.1174/9/7

CP(73)138

Cabinet decided:

- (i) that Fiji Diplomatic Passports should be given to:
 - (a) Heads of Fiji's overseas missions and their wives, but not their children (unless they travel on the father's or mother's passport);
 - (b) Members of the diplomatic staff of Fiji's overseas missions, who are citizens of Fiji; and
 - (c) Cabinet Ministers and their wives travelling abroad on Government business, on the condition that they relinquish such passports when they are no longer Cabinet Ministers.
- (ii) officers who have relinquished their overseas posting will be required to surrender their diplomatic passports; and
- (iii) all those issued with diplomatic passports will be expected to pay the full cost.



R.T. Sanders
Secretary to the Cabinet

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF THE CABINET

CP(1986): 20th Meeting

Date: 12/07/1986

CABINET DECISION

Saturday 12 July 1986

241. Diplomatic Passports - C.1174/9/17

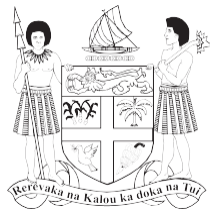
CP(86)170

Cabinet agreed that:

- (i) the present list of those eligible for diplomatic passports be extended to include:
 - (a) Ministers of State and their spouses;
 - (b) The Chief Justice and spouse;
 - (c) The Speaker of the House of Representatives and spouse;
 - (d) The President of the Senate and spouse;
 - (e) Leader of the Opposition and spouse;
 - (f) Ombudsman and spouse.
- (ii) Diplomatic Passports would be relinquished when the office bearers vacate office;
- (iii) all those issued with diplomatic passports to pay the full cost; and
- (iv) 1st June, 1986, to be effective date of extended list.



L.B. Ah Koy
Secretary to the Cabinet



I assent.

J. K. KONROTE
President

[6 June 2016]

AN ACT

TO AMEND THE PASSPORTS ACT 2002

ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji—

Short title and commencement

1.—(1) This Act may be cited as the Passports (Amendment) Act 2016.

(2) This Act comes into force on a date or dates appointed by the Minister by notice in the Gazette.

(3) In this Act, the Passports Act 2002 is referred to as the “Principal Act”.

Section 2 amended

2. Section 2 of the Principal Act is amended by—

(a) in subsection (1), inserting the following new definitions—

““disciplined force” means—

- (a) the Republic of Fiji Military Forces;
- (b) the Fiji Police Force; or
- (c) the Fiji Corrections Service;

“Fijian official passport” means a passport issued under section 9A; “peacekeeping duty” means any peacekeeping or peace enforcement mission sanctioned by the Government;” and

(b) in subsection (2), inserting “and a Fijian official passport” after “emergency passport”.

New sections 9A, 9B, 9C, 9D and 9E inserted

3. The Principal Act is amended by inserting the following new sections after section 9—

“Fijian official passport

9A.—(1) A passport officer may, upon receipt of an application—

(a) made in the approved form; and

(b) endorsed by the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Commissioner of Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service, as the case may be,

issue a Fijian official passport to a member of the disciplined force travelling on peacekeeping duties.

(2) A person issued with a Fijian official passport under subsection (1) must be a citizen of Fiji.

Use of Fijian official passport

9B.—(1) The Director of Immigration must, by notice in the Gazette, prescribe a list of countries within which a Fijian official passport may be used.

(2) A member of the disciplined force must not use his or her Fijian official passport for the purpose of travelling to a country that is not included in the list of countries prescribed by the Director of Immigration under subsection (1).

(3) A member of the disciplined force must not use his or her Fijian official passport for any personal travel within any of the countries prescribed under subsection (1).

(4) A member of the disciplined force who contravenes subsection (2) or (3) shall be subject to such disciplinary action as may be determined by the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Commissioner of Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service, as the case may be.

Return of Fijian official passport at the end of peacekeeping duties

9C.—(1) Upon the completion of his or her peacekeeping duties, a member of the disciplined force must submit his or her Fijian official passport to the Department of Immigration upon arrival at the first point of entry in Fiji.

(2) The Department of Immigration shall, reissue a Fijian official passport that has been submitted under subsection (1) to the relevant member of the disciplined force, upon receipt of written request by the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military

Forces, Commissioner of Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service, as the case may be, which includes—

- (a) the name of the member of the disciplined force that will be engaged in the peacekeeping mission;
- (b) the proposed duration of his or her peacekeeping duty; and
- (c) the country within which the peacekeeping duty will be based.

(3) A member of the disciplined force who contravenes subsection (1) shall be subject to such disciplinary action as may be determined by the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Commissioner of Police or Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service, as the case may be.

Cancellation of a Fijian official passport

9D.—(1) A Fijian official passport may be cancelled by the Director of Immigration where a person who was issued with a Fijian official passport ceases to be a member of the disciplined force.

(2) A Fijian official passport cancelled in accordance with subsection (1) shall become void immediately.

Offences

9E. Any person who—

- (a) makes any unauthorised alteration, addition, deletion to or in any Fijian official passport issued under this Act;
- (b) issues a Fijian official passport without lawful authority;
- (c) issues or produces a document that is false with the intent that the false document should be used, acted on or accepted as a Fijian official passport; or
- (d) uses or issues the Fijian passport to any other person or for any other purpose contrary to the intention of section 9A,

commits an offence and is liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to a term of imprisonment of 2 years, or to both.”

Passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji this 2nd day of June 2016.

ANNEX 4
LIST OF DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS ISSUED, PERIOD 5TH DECEMBER, 2006 TO 23RD DECEMBER, 2022

LIST OF DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS ISSUED_BY INDIVIDUALS_ACTIVE/NON-ACTIVE								
NO.	TRAVEL_ DOC_NO	ISSUE_DATE	EXP_DATES	SURNAME	OTHERNAME	DOB	PROFESSION	REMARKS
1	D001758	20 January 2006	20 January 2016	JOHNSON	DANIEL MASIREWA JACOB	27 October 1959	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
2	D001759	08 February 2006	08 February 2016	SINGH	AJAY	22 February 1963	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
3	D001760	09 March 2006	09 March 2016	TIKONASAU	SAMISONI SPEIGHT	10 January 1955	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
4	D001761	24 April 2006	24 April 2016	TIKOCA	ISOA DELAMISI	29 June 1952	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
5	D001762	28 April 2006	28 April 2016	TIKOCA	ADI VACISEVA BONACIBAU	23 September 1954	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
6	D001769	05 July 2006	05 July 2016	SAUKURU	RATU MELI QOVUQOVUIVOSA	04 May 1946	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
7	D001770	05 July 2006	05 July 2016	IRWIN	VERNEY CHRISTOPHER ROBIN	10 September 1936	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
8	D001772	19 July 2006	19 July 2016	VAYESHNOI	LEKH RAM	15 May 1965	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
9	D001773	24 July 2006	24 July 2016	NAND	RAGHO	28 February 1943	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
10	D001774	26 July 2006	26 July 2016	RAROKOQICA	RATU KINIJAJOI	09 August 1948	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
11	D001776	15 August 2006	15 August 2016	VUSONIBOLA	JOSEFA BOLE	04 December 1939	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
12	D001778	28 August 2006	28 August 2016	BUNE	POSECI WAQALEVU	09 September 1946	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
13	D001777	31 August 2006	31 August 2016	VUSONIBOLA	ANA KOROIQAUTOGA	16 August 1954	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
14	D001782	17 October 2006	17 October 2016	KANAIMAWI	EPELI	07 May 1938	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
15	D001783	08 November 2006	08 November 2016	KANAIWAWI	SOVIA	30 August 1943	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
16	D001791	20 March 2007	20 March 2017	CAVUILATI	JOSIVINI NAIDREWE NAKILIMOCE	17 April 1953	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
17	D001790	20 March 2007	20 March 2017	SUKANAIVALU	NETANI	27 December 1945	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
18	D001792	09 May 2007	09 May 2017	KUMAR	JAINEND	25 October 1946	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
19	D001793	28 June 2007	28 June 2017	CHAUDHRY	MAHENDRA PAL	02 September 1942	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE

20	D001794	16 July 2007	16 July 2017	SMITH	MASON FLYNN	16 November 1962	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
21	D001795	30 July 2007	30 July 2017	LEWENI	NEUMI	06 November 1957	MILITARY OFFICER	NON-ACTIVE
22	D001796	30 July 2007	30 July 2017	WARADI	TAITO TUKAI	13 June 1954	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
23	D001797	18 September 2007	18 September 2017	CHETTY	PON SAMI	19 February 1954	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
24	D001799	18 September 2007	18 September 2017	SAUTU	SEMESA	05 July 1957	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
25	D001798	18 September 2007	18 September 2017	RAVULA	ULAIASI TIRA	11 May 1964	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
26	D001802	18 October 2007	18 October 2017	GANILAU	EPELI GAVIDI	10 October 1951	MILITARY OFFICER	NON-ACTIVE
27	D001803	25 October 2007	25 October 2017	AHCOY	JAMES MICHAEL	30 November 1936	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
28	D001804	31 October 2007	31 October 2017	ALI	BASIR	20 July 1965	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
29	D001805	21 November 2007	21 November 2017	NAVAKAMOCE	JONE VUCUKULA	16 December 1964	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
30	D001806	28 November 2007	28 November 2017	TIKOITOGA	MOSESE	20 September 1961	MILITARY OFFICER	NON-ACTIVE
31	D001808	05 December 2007	05 December 2017	KAUNISELA	REPEKA MARA	31 January 1958	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
32	D001807	05 December 2007	05 December 2017	KAUNISELA	SAVENACA	03 March 1957	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
33	D001809	05 February 2008	05 February 2018	SINGH	RATISH VINAY PAL	06 August 1977	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
34	D001811	29 February 2008	28 February 2018	TIKOISUVA	SEINIANA LEWAQELE	05 January 1948	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
35	D001810	29 February 2008	28 February 2018	TIKOISUVA	PIO	13 March 1947	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
36	D001813	26 March 2008	26 March 2018	LUVENI	JIKO FATAFEHI	20 November 1945	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
37	D001814	08 April 2008	08 April 2018	BOLE	FILIPE NAGERA	23 August 1936	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
38	D001815	16 May 2008	16 May 2018	COKANASIGA	JOKETANI STUCHBERY WAQANIVALU	28 June 1937	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
39	D001819	29 May 2008	29 May 2018	CHAUDHRY	HANNAH IRIS VIRMATI	09 January 1945	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE

40	D001820	04 June 2008	04 June 2018	DRITI	PITA RAGOLEA	29 October 1960	MILITARY OFFICER	NON-ACTIVE
41	D001821	27 June 2008	27 June 2018	PETERO	PHILIP	18 May 1951	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
42	D001822	04 July 2008	04 July 2018	SAMUWAI	VANI RARAWA	28 February 1952	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
43	D001824	14 July 2008	14 July 2018	TUILOMA	SEREIMA ROKONAWATI	08 December 1959	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
44	D001823	14 July 2008	14 July 2018	TUILOMA	CAMA TUIQILAQILA	08 April 1954	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
45	D001825	28 July 2008	28 July 2018	LOMALAGI	VERETARIKI SILIVAKARUA	22 July 1962	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
46	D001826	29 July 2008	29 July 2018	ARYA	KAMLESH KUMAR	08 August 1952	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
47	D001827	29 July 2008	29 July 2018	KUMAR	URMILA DEIV	01 June 1952	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
48	D001829	07 August 2008	07 August 2018	RICKETTS	TOM RONALD	02 August 1945	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
49	D001830	18 August 2008	18 August 2018	NATUVA	TIMOCI LESIKIVATUKOULA	17 July 1957	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
50	D001832	03 October 2008	03 October 2018	LUTUBULA	SEREIMA MADA	10 July 1952	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
51	D001831	03 October 2008	03 October 2018	LUTUBULA	SULIASI	18 February 1954	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
52	D001833	20 October 2008	20 October 2018	LIGAIRI	ROSS ILIAVI VUKICANAVANUA	13 August 1951	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
53	D001836	29 December 2008	29 December 2018	KATONITABUA	NAIPOTE TAKO	15 October 1972	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
54	D001838	09 January 2009	09 January 2019	DRAUNIMASI	JONE	08 December 1960	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
55	D001840	18 February 2009	18 February 2019	TULELE	PECELI KAMANALAGI	20 January 1960	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
56	D001848	25 March 2009	25 March 2019	TABUNAKAWAI	NIUMAIA	14 March 1951	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
57	D001844	26 March 2009	26 March 2019	MOHAMMED	AZIZ	07 July 1964	MILITARY	NON-ACTIVE
58	D001845	26 March 2009	26 March 2019	THOMPSON	QUEENIE PAULINE VERONICA	02 October 1942	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
59	D001846	26 March 2009	26 March 2019	THOMPSON	WINSTON	08 July 1940	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE

60	D001841	16 April 2009	16 April 2019	SHARMA	NEIL PRAKASH	29 September 1954	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT	NON-ACTIVE
61	D001849	25 May 2009	25 May 2019	TABUNAKAWAI	OFAKILOMALOMA MARIA PATRICIA	12 June 1955	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
62	D001852	09 July 2009	09 July 2019	ISIMELI	MURRAY RIVIE	25 July 1974	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
63	D001853	09 September 2009	09 September 2019	MATAITOGA	VENINA MOTUATOGA	13 November 1950	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
64	D001856	25 January 2010	25 January 2020	DAUNIVALU	LUKE	26 April 1974	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
65	D001858	03 February 2010	03 February 2020	THOMSON	PETER WILLIAM	18 November 1948	DIPLOMAT	NON-ACTIVE
66	D001859	11 February 2010	11 February 2020	SAUMATUA	SAMU ALIVERETI	20 November 1947	MILITARY OFFICER	NON-ACTIVE
67	D001860	08 April 2010	08 April 2020	TORA	MERE SAU	21 March 1950	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE
68	D001861	31 May 2010	31 May 2020	ULUIVUDA	RATU JOSEFA ILOILOVATU	29 December 1920	PRESIDENT	NON-ACTIVE
69	D001862	31 May 2010	31 May 2020	ULUIVUDA	SALASEINI KAVU	23 September 1952	OTHER	NON-ACTIVE
70	D001863	08 June 2010	08 June 2020	BALEIKASAVU	RAY KINI	19 April 1973	CIVIL SERVANT	NON-ACTIVE