

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**MONDAY, 3RD APRIL, 2023**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**MONDAY, 3RD APRIL 2023**

The Parliament met at 9.36 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable S.T. Koroilavesau.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2023, as previously circulated be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

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 watching proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the PL100 students from the University of the South Pacific. I hope that you will enjoy and also learn from today's proceedings. You are most welcome to Parliament.

Reminder – Official Photo Shoot

Honourable Members, please, be reminded that our Official Photo Shoot is tomorrow, and this will take place immediately when Parliament breaks for morning tea.

**PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

Review Report – Fiji Airports 2020 Annual Report

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this morning, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Fiji Airports 2020 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, this review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this same Report had been reintroduced in this new term of Parliament and have been referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs. As per the

normal process for report scrutiny, the current Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee took note of and deliberated on the previous Committee's work on the mentioned Report, which reiterated the work done by the previous Committee in reviewing and highlighting the contents of the Fiji Airports Annual Report and made recommendations on the anomalies noted in the Report. It also highlighted the discussions held by the Committee with Fiji Airports in relation to the issues noted from its Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airports recorded a net operating profit before tax of \$1.5 million for the year 2020. Fiji Airports declared a total of \$175 million in dividends over the last six years from 2014 to 2019. Despite this unprecedented dividend pay-out, the total shareholder's equity stood at \$448.6 million.

The operation of Fiji Airports was severely affected by the prolonged COVID-19 global pandemic crisis which negatively affected its revenue. However, it remained steadfast to resolve and emerge stronger as an organization, having gained insights, developed strategies and prudently restructured its business model for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament for all their hard work and their efforts which had greatly assisted our Committee in the completion of this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to wish the Members of the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs the very best in this new term of Parliament. I also extend my gratitude to the former Chief Executive Officer of Fiji Airports, Mr Rowan Chalmers, and his staff for their assistance in this review process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all Members of Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- 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.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now note.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

#### Review Report – Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2017-2018 Annual Report

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the pleasure of tabling, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, a Report on the review of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2017-2018. As a brief background, Sir, I wish to advise the members of this august Parliament that the Annual Report was referred to Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the previous Parliament which undertook the

review of this Parliamentary Paper. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the previous Committee could not complete the work on this Annual Report due to the dissolution of the previous Parliament. The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of this Parliament then inherited the responsibility of the review when it was referred the Annual Report on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be necessary at this stage to briefly mention that Parliament's administration comes under the responsibility of the Secretary-General to Parliament through the direction of the Speaker of Parliament, and this administration includes the efficient, effective and economic management of Parliament. Supporting the functions of the Secretary-General to Parliament is the Secretariat known as the Department of Legislature, which is made up of two main Divisions namely - the Legislative Processes Services, now known as Legislative Services Division, and the Administration, Finance and IT Services, now known as the Corporate Services Division.

Mr. Speaker, back to the review work itself, the Committee resolved that it would be appropriate to continue from where our predecessors had left off and reviewed all the information that had been gathered by the previous Committee.

It was noted, Sir, that there were few pertinent issues identified which were communicated to the Department of Legislature for clarification. Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the issues that were identified were as follows:

- That Parliament has made tremendous strides in contributing to the achievement of certain SDGs such as SDG5 and SDG10.
- That Parliament has been provided great support by the Department and donor partners such as the UNDP.
- That the work conditions for Members of Parliament and staff have been given priority which has allowed for Parliament to function well. Furthermore, that the welfare of Members of Parliament and staff had been given ample emphasis so as to maintain a safe work environment.

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee noted that Parliament has done a commendable job during the reported period, and also resolved that it would be necessary to put forth new recommendations for consideration of the Department of Legislature and Parliament which includes:

- The continuation of Parliament's effort in promoting gender equality and empowerment.
- Maintaining the efforts regarding SDG10 by recommending that Parliament consider improving accessibility to the complex by fast-tracking the installation of aids, such as direction signs and other means of accessibility which cater for persons who have mobility issues and that Parliament consider introducing other initiatives such as the *Daily Hansard* being published in different vernaculars we have in Fiji and in *Braille* which would promote inclusivity.
- Recommending that a clear demarcation of the Parliament Precincts is considered by Parliament in order to facilitate easier accessibility to Parliament Precincts which also contributes to the achievement of SDG10.
- Recommending the expeditious digitisation of all Parliamentary *Daily Hansard*.
- Parliamentary space and infrastructure whereby space should be provided for separate Offices for the various Parties represented in Parliament.
- Awareness and public engagement programmes for Parliament – Meet the Speaker and Parliament Bus - be revamped to include all Members of Parliament, opening up more opportunities for engagement with the public.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the representatives of the Department of Legislature for their support and cooperation by providing prompt responses to the Committee's queries.

I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Committee of the previous Parliament for their work which assisted the current Committee in completing the review. I would also like to thank the Members of the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human.

Mr. Speaker, through the Committee's Report, I commend the review of the Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's Annual Report 2017-2018 and recommend that Parliament takes note of the Committee's recommendations.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, and Transport;
- (3) Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry; and
- (4) Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

Honourable Members, Ministers may speak for up to 20 minutes, after which I will invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

### Legislative Programme - 2022-2023 Session of Parliament

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a privilege for me to share with this august Parliament the Legislative Programme for the Year 2022-2023 session of Parliament that will be implemented by the Coalition Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament as the legislative arm of the State has the constitutional authority to formulate and introduce legislation pursuant to Section 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. Section 47 of the Constitution goes on to state how these legislative powers are exercised in terms of introduction, deliberation, amendments and enactment of Bills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Bills that have completed the consultation process or are a matter of urgency and of public interest are brought to Parliament upon approval of Cabinet. An additional factor crucial to this process, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the need for extensive and meaningful consultations on proposed changes to the law or introduction of new laws with people including rural communities.

The Coalition Government is committed to incorporating a consultative approach to key decisions that affects the people of Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, key decisions reached will be based on consensus, relevance and national interest. We will listen to the people and work with all identifiable stakeholders across the sectors and sections of the communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the Legislative Programme for Year 2022-2023, the Coalition Government is determined to review and repeal the laws that suppress basic human rights, media freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of association, individual and group rights, the rule of law and freedom of speech will be sincerely adhered to so that sustainable solutions can be developed to benefit society. We are confident that freedom of speech and freedom of association will inadequately promote participatory and inclusive policy making initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have already begun to, as the proverbial saying goes, “put our money where our mouth is”, we do not simply harp about what we do but we action and honor our words. To demonstrate this on 23<sup>rd</sup> March of this year, we conducted a public consultation on a proposed Bill to replace the controversial Media Industry Development Act 2010 formerly known as MIDA. The consultation was successful held at Level 9, Suvavou House and saw over 50 members of the media and academia in attendance who sought to strengthen the freedom of press and the people’s right to information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also the Government’s priority to review and repeal *iTaukei* related laws that marginalize *iTaukei* rights. Consultations have been initiated in the reinstatement of the Great Council of Chiefs to facilitate the voices and intent of the *iTaukei* traditional leaders and administrators. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cabinet Ministers and also members of the other side are aware, proper consultations with the Land Owning Units (LOUs) were not consulted in a proper manner in 2021 and the *iTaukei* Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Act 2021 was rushed through during the Parliamentary process. Those who were most affected by Act No. 22 of 2021 were the landowners who allowed the facilitation of the processing of mortgages, charges, caveats and pledges without the consent of the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board.

Moreover, under section 11(1) of the *iTaukei* Affairs Act 1944 in relation to the provision on and I quote:

“Procedure with respect to Bills affecting Fijian affairs,

When any Bill to be introduced in Parliament which appears to the Minister to affect in any important matter the rights and interest of the Fijians, and especially any Bill imposing taxes to be paid by them or relating to their chiefs, local authorities or land, it shall be first referred to the Board for consideration...”

That was not conducted in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, this Government is committed to incorporating a consultative approach to key decisions that affect the people of Fiji, particularly in consulting the people and relevant stakeholders on the review of any legislation. Relevant laws related to the administration of the *iTaukei* institutions are currently being considered to improve their respective mandates under the law efficiently and effectively.



In particular, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has already begun preparatory work in the consultation of the re-establishment of the GCC which is traditionally of the apex of the *Vanua*. A team has been set up to take a holistic approach towards the reestablishment of the GCC.

On the same note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is also looking into finalising the regulation of intellectual property rights for indigenous communities which have been on the agenda in ongoing consultations between the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei communities.

The Government is also looking at reviewing legislations on iTaukei, namely, the:

- (1) iTaukei Lands Act 1905;
- (2) iTaukei Lands Trust Act 1940;
- (3) iTaukei Affairs Act 1944;
- (4) iTaukei Development Fund 1965;
- (5) iTaukei Trust Fund 2004;
- (6) Mahogany Industry Development Act 2010;
- (7) Natadola Bay Development Act 2010;
- (8) Momi Bay Development Act 2010;
- (9) Regulation of Surfing Areas Act 2010;
- (10) Denarau (Nadi River) Development Act 2011;
- (11) Land Use Act 2010; and
- (12) State Land Act 1945.

Further, Mr. Speaker Sir, as the matter of fact, we have delivered our promise to increase the retirement age to 60 years from 55 years by amending the Civil Service (General) Regulation 1999 and work is currently underway to execute the removal of short-term contracts for civil servants. Moreover, the reinstatement of the Ratu Sukuna Day and the inclusion of the Girit Day as public holidays have been effected and published in the Gazette.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, relevant amendments have also been made to the Health and Safety at Work, commonly known as the General Workplace Conditions Regulations 2003 or what is called the “No Jab, No Job” Policy. What this means, Sir, is that the requirement to be vaccinated is now no longer a requirement for a person to apply for a job in the civil service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government will continue its efforts to end violence against women and girls and promote women’s economic empowerment. The Coalition Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is determined to ensure the needs and interests of women and girls will be reflected in the legislation, policies and the National Budget.

The Government will also look at reviewing the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1975 and related laws to revert the use of the name in the birth certificate which greatly affected married women and spouses who want to use their spouse’s name instead of their maiden name to vote, for example, or when applying for a passport or a driver’s licence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, preparatory work is underway with the Ministry of Local Government for elections of Municipal Councils. Further, work is also underway to align the retirement age of Civil Service and the Municipal Councils. The Local Government Act 1972 is under review to increase the retirement age from 55 years to 60 years. We intend to introduce an Amendment Bill at the June Sitting of Parliament.

Work is also underway to replace the Tertiary Scholarship and Loan Scheme and National Toppers Scholarship with full scholarships with bond conditions, as mentioned by the honourable Minister of Finance in Parliament last week.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is also looking to soon initiate public consultations on the following reviews:

- (1) Immigration related laws on “travel ban” and declarations of “prohibited immigrants” under the Immigration Act 2003;
- (2) iTaukei related laws – iTaukei Land Act 1905, iTaukei Land Trust Act 1940, iTaukei Affairs Act 1944, iTaukei Development Fund Act 1965 and iTaukei Trust Fund Act 2004;
- (3) Legal Practitioners Act 2009;
- (4) Regulation of nightclub opening hours;
- (5) Regulations of Surfing Areas Act 2010;
- (6) Fisheries laws namely Fisheries Act 1941, Offshore Fisheries Management Act 2012;
- (7) Regulation of Aquaculture;
- (8) Bankruptcy Act 1944;
- (9) Local Government Act 1972;
- (10) Forest Act 1992;
- (11) Mahogany Industry (Licensing and Branding) Act 2011;
- (12) Mahogany Industry Development Act 2010;
- (13) Fiji Pine Act 1990;
- (14) Corrections Service Act 2006;
- (15) Fiji Independence Commission Against Corruption Act 2007;
- (16) Agricultural Laws namely:
  - (a) Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act 1966;
  - (b) Agricultural Marketing Authority Act 2004;
  - (c) Banana Export and Marketing Act 1960;
  - (d) Birds and Game Protection Act 1923;
  - (e) Brands Act 1928;
  - (f) Coconut Industry Development Act 2010;
  - (g) Co-operative Dairy Companies Act 1974;
  - (h) Copra Industry Loans Act 1976;
  - (i) Dairies Act 1965;
  - (j) Dogs Act 1968;
  - (k) Fencing Act 1955;
  - (l) Ginger Council of Fiji Act 1996;
  - (m) Goats (Ear-marks) Act 1955;
  - (n) Land Conservation and Improvement Act 1953;
  - (o) Land Development Act 1961;
  - (p) Meat Industry Act 1969;
  - (q) Pesticides Act 1971;
  - (r) Pound Act 1877;
  - (s) Protection of Animals Act 1954;
  - (t) Stock Improvement Act 1932;
  - (u) Trespass of Animals Act 1955;
  - (v) Veterinary Surgeons Act 1956;
- (17) Review of National Defence and National Security.

We are also looking at reviewing the Law Reform Commission. We have made commitment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we will ensure that all initiatives and draft legislation will undergo a thorough

consultation process from better and effective outcomes. We will ensure, Sir, that draft laws are deliberated in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

In doing so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government will build on the confidence and trust with businesses, investors and the wider community with regards to future policy and legislative initiatives and incentives in order to strengthen our institutions and legal framework.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that we have already begun to walk the talk as we are actively making efforts to ensure that the views of all members of our communities are heard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, for their response.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Attorney-General for his brief statement on articulating the legislative programme for 2022-2023 Session of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to give everyone a bit of background and suggest in case everyone has forgotten, with respect. This particular book - our Constitution, emanates from what was done in 2007. This was actually a consultation exercise that came out of the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Show respect!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, they asked us to be respectful, may be you ought to, too.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I did not utter a word whilst the honourable Attorney-General was speaking.

This particular Charter entailed a lot things, Sir, but I just wanted to spell out something so that the people of Fiji know and may be just a reminder to the other side, that the outreach activities with respect to the National Council for Building a Better Fiji and the consultations that were undertaken throughout the country, the coverage was all the urban centres and about a thousand odd villages and settlements across the nation which came up with our Constitution, Mr. Speaker.

I only have five minutes, but I just wanted to specifically refer to two things that the honourable Attorney-General spoke about. He spoke about the suppression of freedom, specifically, the Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Association.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all freedoms are covered under the Bill of Rights in this particular book. Section 6 right through to Section 45 that is 39 ....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It was 73.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- May be he likes the sound of his own voice.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir. Section 6 right through to Section 45 covers every single freedom that you can actually think about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two that he basically referred to was the Freedom of Association and also Freedom of Expression, and I think he said some issues about the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to Freedom of Association, Section 19(1) reads, and I quote: “Every person has the right to freedom of association.

Mr. Speaker, that covers the whole lot. It is guaranteed in here. If you have issue with respect to freedom of association, there are even provisions in this book that allows you to go to court to take it up. How is that not guaranteed? The same applies to freedom of expression.

Mr. Speaker, he says that he is going to repeal laws widely held as suppressing basic freedom, they have not ever been any suppression under this blue book. There has not been. It is a story that they make up which follows their narrative, “Oh, freedom!”. Freedom from what?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Freedom from you.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am a lawyer. I read it better than you do.

Mr. Speaker, let me get specific. Within this Constitution there is a thing that dictates the separation of powers. Just on 1<sup>st</sup> of April, the honourable Attorney-General himself would seem has overstepped the mark.

HON. J. USAMATE- Very poor, very poor!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, he sent a personnel staff officer to inform a Judicial Officer of his decision to say, “Pay a sum of \$1,500 as restitution on behalf of the accused person.” Mr. Speaker, that is crossing the line!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor, very poor!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, there is a Point of Order.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very clear to us that we are talking about the legislative agenda of the country. He is now bringing in issues that have nothing to do with the legislative agenda of this country.

Honourable Member, stick to what is on the paper. Very simple! He is a lawyer and lawyers understand simplicity, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am a lawyer, I understand it, and that is why I am raising it because there is a purported breach of the Constitution, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Attorney-General is the Chief Legal Advisor to Government...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- ...and not to the general public. Mr. Speaker, he needs to understand now that he is Attorney-General, that he must act as such. You have a role to play, even in the selection of Judicial Officers. You must not intervene or make representations in a personal capacity in such matters.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- , Mr. Speaker, can be seen as the Executive interfering with the Judicial process.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- A Point of Order, again, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I know the second bell has rung.

MR. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order, honourable Koya.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 60 is on relevance. We are now becoming irrelevant. I know they are trying to be relevant but, unfortunately, they are getting very irrelevant.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are you rounding off, honourable Member?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, I have a great deal of respect for the honourable Minister for Trade. Do not demean yourself, please.

In short, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to basically finish off, so let me put this question to you, honourable Attorney-General, on equality. Every religion in Fiji preaches equality. No discrimination on the basis of race, colour, creed, anything, Sir. All are guaranteed under this blue book.

If you are talking about a programme that you are going to understand with respect to review of the legislation, we did that too. I respect you for it, that is fine. There are a lot of archaic laws that we need to undertake, that is fine. But when you are talking about suppression of freedom, suppression of any freedom at the end of the day, I think you are actually 100 percent wrong. Equality for all means no discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, I think what needs to be said, finally, is in the Preamble of this Constitution, we recognised everyone, including the *iTaukei*, the Rotuman and our Banaban people. We recognised that this is the supreme law of the country.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Republic of Fiji is a sovereign democratic republic founded on the values of common and equal citizenry and national unity. Those words 'equal citizenry' should be tattooed on everyone's forehead, Sir.

That is what this former Government was all about and that is what our Constitution says, and I hope every single law that they are going to bring through this Parliament bears that at the forefront of its acts and thoughts.

Lastly, Sir, I think the honourable Minister of Finance needs to remain the Minister of Finance. He himself said, “That my Prime Minister said to me that I am the Minister of Finance and I want to know what my obligations are and what my obligations are not”. This is not, it is his.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, may I just remind you that the tradition in Parliament is that when honourable Members make their Maiden Speeches, that is only when we allow clapping to be undertaken. I would like to implore on each and every one that we kind of respect this Parliament, so no clapping when a Member finishes taking the floor.

### Water and the Way Forward

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, I rise today as the Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services to provide Parliament with an update of water in Fiji.

As I speak Sir, countries around the world are meeting and taking stock of the progress they have made during this UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation - the decade from 2018 to 2028. Five years in, globally the focus is on Mid-Term Comprehensive Review of Implementation.

As a country, Fiji is also working towards the UN Sustainable Development Goal targets for water and sanitation. As of today, nationally 82 percent of Fijians now have access to water supply. This number is close to 98 percent in urban areas, with more work to be done in providing access to water in rural areas.

Access to water supply is not the same as access to reliable 24/7 water supply, and I acknowledge that those of you who live in Suva do not have to be reminded of the difference in the two. I will brief Parliament on unique challenges of the Greater Suva area and the Coalition Government’s plan to improve this situation.

Unreliable water supply and disruptions not only cause unnecessary pain to thousands of Fijians, but it also has a significant socio-economic toll, with lost productivity and impact on all key economic sectors.

The Greater Suva area is supplied by two main water treatment plants - Tamavua and Waila. Both these plants draw raw water from the Waimanu.

Tamavua Water Plant was built in 1961 and the plant has a designed treatment capacity of 60 million litres per day. Waila Treatment Plant was built in 1982 and that Plant has a designed treatment capacity of 95 million litres per day.

When the two Treatment Plants were built, the total population of the greater Suva area was less than 100,000. Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 360,000 people live in the greater Suva area.

The greater Suva area population has tripled but it is still being served by the same two Treatment Plants. What is important to note is that today, just to meet the demand, Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) runs these old Plants at 110 percent of their designated capacity. Despite that, there is still a daily shortage of three million litres between supply and demand.

We have all had our disappointments with WAF. When the tap runs dry in the morning, we all need someone to blame. But I respectfully ask Parliament to indulge with me in the daily magic we expect from WAF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are relying on WAF to produce 110 percent of designed capacity from the two 40-year-old water Treatment Plants. The Greater Suva area also has no redundancy whatsoever, which means that even with one failed pump, or one faulty switchboard, it brings the entire system to its knees.

The WAF pipe network is about 5,000 kilometres and most of it is old and failing. In March this year alone, WAF had responded to 150 burst mains. This, when compared to the international benchmark of three burst mains annually for every 100 kilometres of network, is a huge task. What the benchmark tells us is that we have our pipe network in an ideal maintained condition that should be no more than 150 burst mains throughout Fiji every year.

Today, the rate at which new burst mains occur, is greater than WAF's ability to fix, given its budget and resources. Sir, the assets are old and need significant intervention. We cannot continue to bleed at this rate.

In addition, non-revenue water, in other words, the water that gets lost through leakage is now costing the Authority \$23 million annually. Leakage detection and rectification will be intensified and properly resourced.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, WAF has inherited age old infrastructure. I heard those sitting on the opposite side talk about this ageing infrastructure many times. I always give credit to where credit is due. They were right when they said infrastructure is ageing but what they failed to understand was that ageing infrastructure cannot magically heal itself. It needs investment.

The Coalition Government understands that it needs to work with our funding partners to get the funds we need to build resilient infrastructure. That is being actively pursued right now.

Sir, those on the opposite side had left the WAF with the task of getting blood out of stone. While they talked about ageing infrastructure, they reduced the WAF's Capital budget by 53 percent in the last five years, and Repairs and Maintenance budget was also dropped by 59 percent. This will not be the case with the Coalition Government.

We are midway into the Decade of Action on Water and Sanitation, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If access to 24/7 reliable water supply is a challenge, the task of providing access to proper sanitation is even more challenging. As a nation, we have achieved very little on providing access to proper sanitation. If we continue on the current trajectory, Fiji will not be able to meet the United Nations SDG 6 targets for sanitation by 2030.

Presently only 23 percent of our population has access to proper sanitation and the impacts on health and environment is significant. In our urban areas we do have wastewater collection and treatment, the sewage network is already reaching capacity and wastewater treatment plants reaching the end of their design life. Whether it is Kinoya Wastewater Treatment Plant in Suva or Navakai in Nadi, we are already at design capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, population growth in the Greater Suva area, as well as rapidly growing Nadi in the West, requires urgent attention on wastewater treatment plants. We, as a government, understands that lack of attention to proper sanitation in rural areas, informal settlements, as well as new urban expansion areas will have a significant impact and needs to be prioritised.

The Water Ministers of the Pacific met in Nadi in November 2022. Fiji was represented and it stressed the need for urgent action on sanitation. We will honour this international commitment and will embark upon delivering on this critical area.

We cannot talk about water without acknowledging climate change, Sir. Fiji has been experiencing some major climatic events that have either disrupted the provision of service or completely damaged water and wastewater assets. We have had significant floods in the North, and I visited the WAF Team in the North and inspected the damage. The cost of quick fixtures to respond supplies to Labasa ran into thousands, Sir.

Unfortunately, for Fiji, the impacts of climate change are growing and severe every year. If not addressed significantly, our ability to access clean drinking water to all Fijians will be severely impacted. Designing and building climate resilient infrastructure is the only way. Hydrology data also indicates more fluctuations in river stream flow at Savura and Waila, worsened by climate change, human activity, silting and soil erosion.

Sir, the World Bank has done a Climate Vulnerability Assessment Report for Fiji in 2017, the cost to reduce Fiji's vulnerability to climate change was estimated at US\$4.2 billion. In planning for future water infrastructure, it is critical that vulnerability is addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, WAF was created by our predecessors with the aim of improving water and sanitation. It would be fair to note that the aim with which the WAF was created is yet to be achieved. A capable and financially viable WAF will be able to deliver its intended aim which is critical for Fiji's economy.

In February, I met with the Asian Development Bank Team looking at WAF's journey from its inception to now. It was their conclusion that the current legal, regulatory and institutional framework the way it operates now is inhibiting its ability to deliver water and wastewater services. The issues raised are being re-assessed and will be acted on.

The corporatisation of WAF is critical for its ability to access various funding models that are currently not available to it. I should make it clear that corporatisation does not impede the Government's ability to provide subsidised water and wastewater services where needed. Incentivising water mitigation measures to expand these measures, is being looked into.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my intent is to provide an update to paint a clear and honest picture about the current state of water in Fiji, and I would like to assure everyone that the Coalition Government will improve on the situation in the four years ahead of us and we will also be looking at long term measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Rewa River Water Supply Project will bring online additional 40 million litres of water per day into the Suva-Nausori system. The project construction is on track to be completed by July this year. It will be a big boost for the Greater Suva-Nausori area and end the need for intermittent supply in parts of the system.

I have met the Project Managers and key contractors on site at Viria and impressed upon them that this system must come online in July. I thank my predecessor, honourable Usamate, for his role in the project and it is my duty as a succeeding Minister to see that it is completed on time. I am personally monitoring the project progress.

We also need to improve the water supply network redundancy, and we are looking into the emergency works that are required to create some redundancy in the system, allowing WAF to help maintain critical assets without bringing the entire system down. Extra reservoirs in strategic locations are being looked into.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, to mitigate the current challenges with water supply in Nadi and Lautoka area, there is an urgent need for additional water storage infrastructure to cope with the increasing demand, and we, as a government, have initiated a scope review of the proposed Nadi Flood Mitigation Project. We have been advised that a multi-purpose storage would meet flood mitigation, as well as water supply objectives.

While we work on short-term measures, the reality remains that our current water supply system remains vulnerable, and we need to look at short term measures, such as water truck operations. This is an area which we are also looking into. There have been complaints and they are being currently addressed for better services in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to inform Parliament that the Coalition Government has started the development of the Water Sector 2050 Strategy. This is a long-term plan for the water sector, bringing together all key stakeholders of the economy such as tourism, agriculture, industry regulators, banking and technology, et cetera.

It will focus on improving customer services and delivery of water services to citizens. It will prioritise the economics of the provision of water services for supporting national development, through investments in climate-resilient infrastructure.

During the World Water Day, an ideation workshop was held to kick start this Water Sector Strategy development and the outcome will be a discussion paper for releasing at the National Economic Summit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will finish by saying that water and sanitation infrastructure requires long term thinking, and it is imperative on the current generation to plan for a better Fiji. As a nation, for the first time, the Water Sector 2050 Strategy will provide us with a national vision on water, and will ensure that we are not in the same position come 2050. It can still be utilised by FijiFirst, when it returns to power in 16 years.

In addition, I note that there is a need for a National Infrastructure Strategy. This is being pursued with our development partners to complement the Water Sector 2050 Strategy, the associated Financial Strategy and the Infrastructure Strategy.

To conclude, our attitude to water must change. Sir, it is a precious commodity, and the Government will do what it can, and the public also has a part to play in proactive water conservation measures and mitigation.

As a Minister, I am committed to achieving the objectives relating to water, as I have set out for the next four years. Let us all work together on Water.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now intend to adjourn Parliament for morning tea. When we return, I shall ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate to make their response to the Statement. The Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.03 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to make their response.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to reply to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Public Works in relation to water. He has outlined a lot of the things that WAF and the Ministry is looking at and basically a lot of the things that we have been talking about for the past four years, about the plans. So, it is good now to see that those same plans and expressions have now been expressed by the other side once they have walked into the light and seen the situation as it was. I only wish that honourable Radrodro was the one making the statement since he used to attack me all the time on those issues.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the strategic development plan was in place. A lot of these issues were addressed in terms of the programmes that have been set around for all across the water sector systems in Fiji. But as I had pointed out in my End of Week Statement on Friday, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2023 and as the Minister has pointed, infrastructure is not something that you can do overnight because you always have the problems of the past and the problems of today, and you have got to manage both and you never have enough money for everything. So, I am glad to see that that is being worked out, we looked at all the different projects that were established, all kinds of different things were put in place over a five-year period – boundary valve replacements, air valves, reservoir upgrading, new water treatment plant, wastewater and sanitation

I think the biggest thing that we have had been able to do is the Rewa River Water Scheme. It has been in place for a long time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you put in place a water facility, you do it after years of gathering data, so before we put in a water plant, for instance in the south of Taveuni, which is a big issue right now, you have to measure the flow of water in good weather, dry weather before you make the decision to spend millions of dollars on an infrastructure. I am glad to see that this progress has taken place.

On top of this is the issue of Climate Change, but you will notice with some of the things that the Minister is talking about, some of the solutions are not just in infrastructure. For instance, the issues that we are having in Waimanu and by the way, the Waimanu River is very important to a lot of people in Parliament. I would just like to mention that.

One of the issues there, the dirt in the water, the turbidity in the water is not just about water itself, it is about agriculture, how we cut down trees, reef to ridge, all of these things have to be managed holistically. There are a lot of challenges. People are now crying for water. In my house, you come now to my bathroom, I have water stored in pots and whatever to put the water in. I know it is a major problem. People are still calling for water carts, there is never enough money for all of these, so it is a great challenge for us. I wish the honourable Minister well on all the plans that he has put in place.

The FijiFirst Government, when it was in place, put in a lot of these processes:

- The climate vulnerability report, something that we had undertaken.
- The National Climate Finance Strategy, where we looked at all the things that were to be impacted by climate especially the vulnerability of our infrastructure which are located next to the sea.

One can see the big problem that we have in Laqere where the major pipes are right in the middle of the road as a result of road extensions, and it becomes a huge problem to move these

infrastructure away from where it is now. But ultimately in terms of getting resilient infrastructure, this is what we have to do. I am glad the honourable Minister is not complaining, not like some other Deputy Prime Ministers who we were talking about the other day. His getting ahead with the job. We need to get the financing. We need to get the work hand in hand with people who can help us.

I was glad to see the report that came out of Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility. Their report was handed out to the Pacific Water and Wastewater Forum that I think one of the last things I chaired as Minister in Denarau which outlined a lot of the problems.

A big problem that we have in this Greater Suva area now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the increase in population, it is about 2.5 percent per year. The inflow of people from the rural areas into this. So, it is going to have an even bigger problem in the future.

The FijiFirst Government tried to address this initially by making restructure right, getting the systems to make this correct. We took out the Water and Sewerage Department, we created the Water Authority of Fiji. It did not mean that automatically everything will be hunky-dory, but over time, good governance, good systems, good ways of managing that process, we will ultimately get to the target of having good clean water for everyone and good sanitation for all our people in this country.

Sir, I wish the honourable Minister well, but we will be constantly reminding him that everything that you are doing now is what we had put in place, and we look forward to the day when you start developing something on your own.

#### Strategic Framework for Sandalwood Research and Development

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a very good morning to you and to the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow colleagues of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen listening from the public gallery and members of the public watching the livestream from the comfort of their homes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you very much for the opportunity to deliver this statement on Fiji's proposed Sandalwood Industry Development Strategy. The Strategy provides Fiji's plans for the development of a forest product which has a lot of history and sentimental value for the people of Fiji. This Statement unpacks key actions implemented by the Ministry of Forestry, in collaboration efforts with partners in development, resources injected to develop the sandalwood industry and areas that is still needing attention to fully realise optimal returns from the sandalwood industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir sandalwood is not a new commodity in Fiji. As we all know, sandalwood is the pioneer commodity traded in Fiji, unfortunately it has not been utilised to its full potential. The history of sandalwood and its current potential and market demand calls for its revitalisation as a forest commodity. This is the silver lining in the forestry sector apart from pine and mahogany that will propel the sector, benefit the community and supports national economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to elaborate on the Ministry's priorities within the next few years. Firstly, the Ministry will continue to strengthen its capacity to support (through Government funding) community-based nurseries to ensure consistent and abundance seed supply for the establishment of new *yasi* farms.

Presently the Ministry of Forestry has also established community-based nurseries and assisted interested communities across Fiji on sandalwood seed technology and nursery operations. Sandalwood is one of the species supported in the "Thirty Million Tree" Planting Initiative with the

aim of increasing local sandalwood resources, for large scale planting that can sustain a sandalwood industry in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, apart from natural sources, it is estimated that there is around 500 hectares of planted sandalwood in Fiji. To this date, there is close to 1,500 recorded sandalwood growers that have planted more than 200,000 sandalwood trees in these 500 hectares.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned in my Maiden Speech, the Coalition Government will ensure survival and growth and not just ticking the box to achieving the targeted number. Focusing on the number alone was one of the biggest mistakes of the previous Government. The *yasi* replanting, nursery and seedling supply is also incentivised through the Ministry's budgetary allocations for this fiscal year and will continue to gain optimum interest from farmers and landowners.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker Sir, in order to reach the optimum levels of utilisation and benefits, we must have a thorough understanding of the value chain, not only the benefits but identify key players and areas of improvement government can assist throughout the supply chain to elevate the status of the commodity.

The Ministry will conduct a comprehensive and integrated value-chain and santol oil analysis to inform the Government of the potential socio-economic benefits, key areas of interest, investment and funding opportunities for the sandalwood industry. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is undeniable that the value of the sandalwood commodity is in its downstream processing and in its value adding.

Thirdly, the Coalition Government through the Forestry Ministry is looking to partner with potential donors, and funding institutions to assist interested commercial saw millers who are keen to expand and grow their operations.

Public-private partnerships with local and international institutions and non-governmental organisations; and effective bilateral partnerships with other countries who have a comparative advantage on sandalwood will be essential if the sandalwood industry in Fiji is to access international markets with premium rates for niche products processed locally.

Fourthly, the Ministry through the Sandalwood Development Programme will establish a sandalwood brand recognition and development in the international marketplace based on its natural properties and competitiveness. We will be reaching out to key agencies within Government to develop this brand.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry takes note of the need to always strike a balance between production and protection. Government have been supporting the sandalwood development programme since 2011 and have invested a total of \$420,000 in the Programme in the last five years, ensuring the inclusive involvement of various key stakeholders including women and young people in the implementation of the project.

Fifthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry continues to value the importance of scientific research. In our journey to fully realize the optimal value of sandalwood, the Ministry in 2020 collaborated with the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) improving the understanding of the breeding biology and genetic diversity of *santalum yasi*, the local species.

For any commercial species, enhancing genetic conservation is important. It is not only to preserve the quality but also the cultural integrity of our local species, so it does not become extinct. The Australian supported programme was for developing strategies to enhance the quality and

availability of *santalum yasi* germ-plasm and disseminating practical outcomes and implications of the project objectives to growers and practitioners.

Sixthly, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry is also working to improve the sandalwood market system to ensure equitable benefits to our local sandalwood growers. A sandalwood market concept has been developed for the establishment of Sandalwood Growers and Buyers Association and was highlighted in the report titled “*South Pacific Sandalwood Industry Plan for Fiji and Tonga*”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry have begun consultation with sandalwood growers in the West and will have consultations with growers in the North and Central Eastern Division then finalise the Association Cooperative bylaws before the formation of the Sandalwood Growers Association in the 2023-2024 financial year in consultation with appropriate agencies. The Ministry is responsible for all sandalwood growers, it will therefore maintain an internal database, capturing information like the location of sandalwood plantations and seedling suppliers that will be shared with the Association once it is established.

Mr. Speaker Sir, throughout history, the high demand for sandalwood has resulted in over-exploitation, illegal cutting and black-market trade. This brings me to the seventh strategy, to develop a fit for purpose regulatory framework for the sandalwood industry in Fiji, as it has been done in other nations. So, to sustainably manage and utilise sandalwood, a National Sandalwood Regulations will be developed in collaboration with other government agencies and stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the market for sandalwood, heartwood and oils from Pacific Island Countries, including Fiji, remained resilient, with 2019 sales of *santalum album* oil at US\$1,750 to US\$2,100 and up to US\$2,500 per kilogramme. The average *santalum yasi* supply in recent decades has rarely exceeded 220 million tonnes of heartwood which is no more than about 7 percent to 8 percent of the global sandalwood market.

The Ministry will therefore strategically focus its efforts on niche markets since it cannot compete with larger countries that have large areas of sandalwood. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is where branding will be vital.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is not only looking at short-term goal but as part of the long-term plan for sandalwood. The Ministry for Forestry has been working very closely with sandalwood growers, buyers, investors to promote and revive the sandalwood industry in Fiji.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sandalwood can only reach industry status if we collectively work together to implement the seven strategies of the Development Framework earlier discussed. I therefore call on key stakeholders to join hands and make this happen. Sir, I thank you very much for your indulgence and opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate for their response.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement this morning on Sandalwood Research and Development and I thank the honourable Minister for the statement. It is a very wonderful, commodity for Fiji - sandalwood. It is the second most expensive wood oil, I think it is second only to argawood.

It was in abundance in Fiji. When they found out about the abundance of sandalwood mainly in the Bua Bay in 1804 and started harvesting it when the Europeans came, it took just a little over a decade for that supply to disappear, it is because sandalwood is very slow growing, and it is quite

rare. I am glad to hear the programme to set a framework so that we can add one more commodity that people can take up and plant for their children.

One issue with planting trees in Fiji I found out when I was the Permanent Secretary is that we tend to think that we plant sandalwood for us and it ends up with us harvesting them prematurely, but if we change that attitude and say, “no, we plant this for the future generation”, then this type of very slow growing but very expensive wood can be harvested when it gets more oil which is a little bit over 20 years. I was just reading that in 2010 they harvested one tree in Lakeba and it was \$16,000 the value for that tree.

I agree that whilst we want to make it an industry, it is also quite a very good commodity if we use it as an insurance policy and I used to advertise it that way when I was Permanent Secretary. For example, if you have a child that is born today and then you go out and plant say 10 sandalwood trees so 20 sandalwood trees, if you have land. So, when the child is 21 years old, those 20 trees are also 21 years old ready to harvest. You are not paying any premium and there is enough money to kick start his or her life.

The same thing can be done to community-based buildings that we build. If we build a church in the village and at the same time we go and plant say 50 *yasi* trees, by the church needs repairing or to be rebuilt in 20 years’ time, there you go, you have 50 trees at \$20,000 each. That is a lot of money to do the work and no more fundraising as we do now.

I think there are three types of sandalwood in Fiji:

1. *Santalum yasi* as the honourable Minister mentioned which is the indigenous Fijian species. The tree does not grow as big, but it got a lot of oil, that is the expensive one; *Santalum album*, I think it is the Indian *yasi*.
2. Hybrid where they cross breed between the two. *Santalum album* (the Indian *yasi* is a bigger tree but it has lesser oil).

When we implemented the One Million Tree earlier, not the one that they are doing now, it gave interest to the planting of the *yasi*. The Ministry of Forestry then come up with this technique of germination of *yasi* which is quite difficult. *Yasi*, if you plant one, in three years’ time the *yasi* begins to flower and fruit and the business from the *yasi* begins there Because you can germinate the fruits of the *yasi* and then you start selling the *yasi* seedlings while you wait. The *yasi* tree as it grows older is for the future generation that come in and harvest.

I would just like to add that there are other expensive trees like agarwood and rosewood that have the same type of growth pattern as *yasi*. They are very expensive, but they are slow growing that maybe as you develop that framework for *yasi*, you should also look at agarwood and rosewood. I know that rosewood is growing in Fiji, I have seen one tree and we can add that to the *yasi* framework. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for that Statement.

#### Ministerial Visit to Australia – PALM programme

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, those in the gallery as well as those watching from their homes; I rise this morning to update Parliament on my Ministerial Visit to Australia from 12<sup>th</sup> March to 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, kindly allow me, first of all, to acknowledge our honourable Prime Minister

for endorsing the Ministerial Visit and also the Australian Government for their continued support in facilitating the visit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must also acknowledge the tremendous support provided by the High Commissioner and his team in Canberra. The High Commission team is our first point of contact in relation to opportunities for improvement by the employers for our Fijian workers. It is sad to note that currently Fiji does not have a Liaison Officer in Australia despite funding approved by the Australian government in 2021 and the failure of the previous government in expediting the appointment of the Liaison Officer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was informed by my team that the last Ministerial Visit to our workers in Australia under the Labour Mobility Programme was in 2018. Since then, no other visit has ever been made to support our workers, even after the borders were opened or reopened, Sir. This, we can say again was sheer neglect on the part of my predecessor among many other things that the Coalition Government under the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister is now trying to correct.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Listen!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that the last Minister for Employment now has the audacity to ask questions in relations to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme, when he did not make a single visit to our workers in Australia in the four-year term that he was the Minister for Employment.

(Honourable P.K. Bala interjected)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- He had the luxury of having a very robust Assistant Minister, he could have even delegated that responsibility to him. He did not even do that. This is the reality of the matter. This is how much they actually care for the workers who are out there left on their own.

HON. P.K. BALA.- We had a system in place.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Another legacy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was quite disturbing to note that despite the Australian Government approving the funding in 2021, there is still no Liaison Officer stationed there.

HON. P.K. BALA.- There was no need.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Let me now dwell on the role of the Liaison Officer, Sir. The Liaison Officer becomes the first point of contact for all our workers to air their grievances for assistance to resolve that. That role cannot be overemphasised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have now taken swift action, we have worked out to ensure that the Liaison Officer's position is advertised under due process and we can assure our workers in Australia and their relatives in Fiji and the entire country that we are going to have a Liaison Officer based in our High Commission very soon and that officer will be travelling around attending to all the grievances of our workers in Australia.

We are also going to open a toll-free line so that workers can register their complaints directly for the Liaison Officer to attend to. The High Commission is working on that. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to repeat, if this was done in a timely manner, many of our workers' concerns could have been addressed long before.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Fijian diaspora has given their full support to the Coalition Government and many are happy to invest in Fiji after the change in Government. This is the new era of Fiji under the profound leadership of the People's Coalition Government and our honourable Prime Minister, that the countries are now united as never before.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will continue to foster better relations for all Fijians and ensure that we look into the opportunities identified through the PALM Scheme on a systematic manner and in line with the policies and legislations in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the primary objectives of my Ministerial visit to Australia was to reaffirm Fiji's commitment under the Vuvale Agreement - relating to labour mobility. My Ministerial Team met with our bilateral partners in the Australian Government, the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, honourable Pat Conroy, and the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, honourable Tony Burke.

During our meetings, both the Ministers have assured, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they will continue to strengthen the Programme, as well as the compliance mechanism that are in place for the protection of the workers. This conversation is now going to continue, Sir, and we expect positive action by the Australian Government in this direction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministerial Team also met with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) - the President of the Trade Union, Ms. Michele O'Neil, and its affiliates from the Health Workers Union, Farm Workers Union and Meat Workers Union where the majority of our workers are employed. I must acknowledge the assistance provided by the National Secretary of the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) in facilitating this meeting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we discussed a range of issues, including the rights of workers to join unions for better employment relations and collective agreement, and getting assistance from the unions in areas where the workers have employment relations issues. It is common knowledge, Sir, that organised workers are better protected, and this is going to happen now. They have access to their trade unions in times of difficulties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also brief the ACTU through President O'Neil and the affiliates on the progress of the Coalition Government and the action taken on Labour Law Review, restoration of Human and Trade Union Rights, the Right to Collective Bargaining, Right to Strike and the establishment of a Tripartite Employment Relations Advisory Board in line with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation. These have been pending since 2016.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the meeting with ACTU was historic. After a long time, a Fijian Minister for Employment met with the ACTU Executives. The ACTU President, Michele O'Neil, in that meeting, also congratulated the Coalition Government for winning the 2022 General Elections and in strengthening relations between employers and Fijian workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Team is also exploring potential growth industries under the programme for our Fijian workers to access, as well as ensuring that minimum standards, terms and conditions of employment as per the contract are complied with, by the current and potential employers.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, the movement of our workers through the Labour Mobility Programme comes directly under the National Employment Centre (NEC) under my portfolio as the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. This visit to support the workers, visit their work sites and their accommodation, I want to repeat, was long overdue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during Wednesday's Parliament session, the honourable Nath asked an Oral Question, can the Minister update Parliament on the Minister's support to the PALM Scheme? Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to that question, I had said, yes, and I now wish to quote from His Excellency the President's Opening Address during the Opening of the 2023-2024 Parliament Session, and I quote,

“Through the *Vuvale* Partnership Programme, Government will work closely with the Australian Government to improve opportunities for labour mobility.”

This, of course, further prompted us to put the exercise into effect without undue delay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Labour Mobility Programmes are part of my Ministry's contribution towards Government's commitment in fulfilling the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 on Decent Work and Employment Growth, as well as SDG 1 on No Poverty. Fiji's National Employment Policy under Policy Priority 5 also highlights the need to promote access to overseas employment opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of this Policy Priority has been an ongoing activity for number of years now. Fiji's participation under the Seasonal Workers Programme started in 2015, following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Australian Government. In 2019, Fiji joined the Pacific Labour Scheme, following the signing of another MOU on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2019. From April 2022, the two Programmes were brought together under the single PALM Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's participation numbers continue to increase steadily over the past seven years but faced an exponential growth from the beginning of 2022. This follows the reopening of our borders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question was asked by honourable Usamate on spouses of the workers joining the Scheme. This discussion is still ongoing with our bilateral partners, and nothing has been finalised yet. There are a number of factors that need to be considered such as cost, expected savings and welfare.

Sir, we have met with the workers at various sites to hear their concerns raised in regard to their welfare and provided advice on addressing such grievances and assured them that we are here to assist them. In terms of the social impacts, the Ministry is keeping a close track of the social issues that have resulted from the Scheme and working on how it can mitigate and reduce the impacts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the total numbers that has participated since 2015 under the seasonal or short-term up to nine-month programme has surpassed 2,500 and with the long-term of one to four years programme surpassing 3,800. As of March 2023, over 6,300 Fijians have participated under the combined PALM Scheme in Australia alone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Bala also raised a supplementary question on the impact of the 'No Jab No Job' Policy on the Programme. Sir, the Ministry will continue to adhere to the Australian Government's requirements on the full vaccination of Fijians who wish to participate under the Scheme, both in Australia and New Zealand, but as alluded to by the honourable Attorney-General

in this Parliament earlier and I confirm that discussions are now ongoing to see how we can get these rules relaxed to meet the Fijian standards by those two Governments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted earlier, the speedy growth of the PALM Scheme has resulted in the total number of 2,500 that participated under the PALM Scheme in 2022 alone and since Fiji joined in 2015. The numbers are expected to continue to grow for the next few years and we will have to be up to it as well, to ensure that we are able to provide that service to all our workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a huge achievement for the hardworking Team in my Ministry that is struggling to secure adequate resourcing levels of growing demands and also sacrificing their valuable family time to work after normal hours, including weekends. Sir, I want to draw the attention of Parliament to the fact that positions vacant for years, not filled despite budgetary allocations are overburdening our existing staff.

Mr. Speaker, from 2019 to 2022 - the three financial years, the Ministry has been having annual savings of an average of \$1 million per annum due to the vacant positions not being filled. These vacant positions, Sir, were critical in the Ministry in terms of functions and ensuring that we meet the needs of the people. However, due to political reasons best known to my predecessor and his Government, these positions were not filled. The Ministry currently has 44 vacant positions from 2020 which we are now trying to fill in consultation with the Ministry of Civil Service in line with the current procedures and policies.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order, honourable Minister.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on relevance. The topic that he had mentioned he was going to speak on was his trip to Australia and because we are going to respond, he is talking about totally something else, apart from his trip to Australia.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am talking about the challenges we are facing in providing that vital service to our workers out there because of the lack of staff in our Ministry. That is the point the honourable Member must understand.

MR. SPEAKER.- Please continue.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has lost 25 established positions, mostly technical in nature, due to not filling these positions from 2018 and funding was taken away by the Ministry of Economy in 2020. This has put the Ministry in a handicap situation. Our performance level and staff morale has taken a battering on the hands of my predecessors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my delegation was able to visit ...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Too many players.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- ... a number of approved employers, workplaces under aged care sector, the meat industry and meet with our Fijian workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must admit that these meetings were very humbling, seeing the impact that the Programme is having not only on our workers but the employers, especially the residents of these Age Care Homes where our workers are so popular. The joy that these residents are expressing towards our workers is heart-touching.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministerial visit could not be complete if we did not engage with our Fijian extended families who now call Australia their home. The Ministerial delegation was able to have several community engagements that were also organised by the Fijian communities. These were through *talanoa* sessions to listen and hear the views of those on the ground and this was also an opportunity, on behalf of the Coalition Government, to seek their support in monitoring and providing welfare support to our Fijian workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our diaspora in Australia have welcomed the Coalition Government with open arms and many are ready to assist us in every way possible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I wish to also respond to a supplementary question that was asked by honourable Maharaj on the misuse of business perspective in relation to gaps created by the Scheme and how the Department of Immigration and the Ministry is dealing with that. Sir, through the PALM Scheme eligible approved employers can recruit workers for up to nine months and for a longer term up to four years in unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled. The movement of these workers overseas to greener pastures is something that is not new and has been happening over the decade and these are personal choices where one prefers to work.

The gaps that are created by the skilled migration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, had been exacerbated because of the closure of our Technical Colleges. That is where the whole issue lies, and the closure of those that were attached to the secondary schools initially, opening of the Technical Colleges and then closing the Technical Colleges as well.

The Scheme, initially, with secondary schools was providing that Stages 1 and 2, and then FNU monitoring that, and then feeding them on to FNU to carry up to Stage 4 and their Diploma was a very effective method. But that was taken away and the Technical Colleges were opened without much study then. So that is the gap that has been created and that gap, I must thank the honourable Minister for Education and the honourable Minister of Finance to provide an opportunity through Polytech which is going to eventuate very soon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is going to work in close consultation with all other stakeholders, including the employers and TVET providers, to try and upskilled our workers in the short-term, medium term and long-term are as per the need of the various industries.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to quote from what honourable Usamate said, “get on with the job”. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to advise him, yes, we are getting on with the job, but we have to clean up the mess as well and that becomes a challenge with all pending work with understaffed and overburdened staff, and the rest of the challenges that we are faced with.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate for their response to the Statement.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in response to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations on his recent visit to Australia. I welcome Government’s position on the *Vuvale* Partnership which was the FijiFirst initiative...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- ...and its continued provisions of much needed employment for Fijians under the PALM Scheme. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not sure of the value of the visit at taxpayers’ expense for these purposes.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. P.K. BALA.- We were quiet when you people were talking.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it seems that the whole of this Coalition Government decided to package holidays for themselves and some of their wives at taxpayers' expense on the pretext of some of the other works and the related visit.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Aww!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Can I suggest to the honourable Member that he stick to ...

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

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Relevance, Standing Order 60, Sir. I am getting tired to saying 'relevance', Sir. I do not know whether they understand the meaning of relevance.

Sir, firstly, he is bordering very close on personalising the issues and in this Parliament, if you remember when I stood up in my Maiden Speech, I asked that we work together. If you are going to start dipping into personalising issues ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are saying one thing and doing another.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ...Sir, like he is just starting to suggest, I know there has been public comments about myself, so I am mentioning this in a very respectful manner. If they want to dip into the personal stuff, we can go ahead and dip into the personal stuff again, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, Sir, can I ask him to be relevant, stick to the Statement and stop meandering around like a baboon. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bala, you may continue.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think he should stop wasting Parliament's time because in his Point of Order, there was no order and, of course, no point.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister had mentioned in this Ministerial Statement about the Liaison Officer. During our term, we worked smart ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... and we had assigned the staff at the Embassy to oversee this Programme. Mr. Speaker, Sir, for record purposes, without having a Liaison Officer, we have sent close to 8,000 Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sent them and forgot about them, that is the problem.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he also tried to justify his trips, the holiday trip to Australia ...

HON. K.K. LAL.- Shame, shame!

HON. P.K. BALA ... by saying, it is very important to have a Ministerial visit. The reason why I never went, because the Australian Ministers were in the country, so we had those type of meetings and *talanoa* sessions, and there was no need for the visit. But I do not know what he found so important in these last 100 days, that he had to go, but that is his choice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the former Minister for this portfolio, the PALM Scheme is already in place and its provisions are secure in providing work for the Fijians. The Ministry and its partners in the Australian Government has all due processes in place and the Programme is ongoing and does not require a Ministerial visit. Maybe, that type of money could have been used to fix some of the potholes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to urge that such visits are made in order to secure programmes or to ensure its expansion, but the Programme is safe. This was a taxpayer-fund drive for the Minister and it is time for the honourable Prime Minister to revisit such visits. This will help ensure that he does not have to discipline Ministers who take off on ill-advised adventures using the money of the poor people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister was among other unionists who criticised the PALM Scheme, as well as other overseas work opportunities secured under the FijiFirst Government. They complained long and hard, Sir, about the loss of workers here in Fiji...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor, very poor!

HON. P.K. BALA.- ...and all of a sudden, he makes an Australian tour to reaffirm the PALM Scheme. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is flip-flop politics at its best.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had the last laugh when my good friend, the honourable Minister for Lands, in his acting capacity as Minister for Employment, went to close the pre-departure training programme and highly spoke of the PALM Scheme. But we all know in this Parliament what his thoughts were on this Programme during the campaign. He knows very well; I do not have to highlight anything on that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the PALM Scheme was secured by the former Prime Minister, among his many other diplomatic initiatives, including the *Vuvale* Partnership that was signed between him and the former Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison. The Programme continues to provide work and skills pathways for thousands of Fijians. It brings much-needed remittance and for most of the workers, it is the life-changing opportunity to build houses, to pay for the education of their children, it improves the quality of life in their village and the community.

However, we were told, this same Government who were on the other side of the Chamber during the last time, said the villages will be empty by this Programme. But now, all is good because they are sitting that side.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not lie. No one said that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Oh yes, they did.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- They did. Yes, they did.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Look at him! You should be the last one to say that.

The complainers about the PALM Scheme failed to recognise that earlier but are quick to jump on a plane to reaffirm this Programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A win-win situation for all concerned in Fiji and our partners in Australia, who came on board in response to one of the many FijiFirst initiatives that our colleague in the Coalition Government are jumping up and down about and taking credit where none is due to them.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Vuvale* Partnership, a Programme that was invested in by the FijiFirst Government is now reaping rewards for all Fijians well beyond any initiatives or programmes that we have yet to see from the Coalition Government in a hundred days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note the Ministerial Statement and welcome the reaffirming of the PALM Scheme as another of the FijiFirst Government initiatives that this Coalition Government is riding on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visit by the honourable Minister was a waste of taxpayers' money and I urge this Coalition Government to demonstrate to the Fijian people its commitment not to spend taxpayers' money on trips that do not bring back material benefits to our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, the teachers have been calling us on the contract. I have received on my phone that the teachers are complaining that they are getting five-year contracts but what we were told, contracts have all gone.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You did not listen to him, what he said.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Can you, please, keep quiet?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, but now, they are giving five-year contracts which was what FijiFirst used to do. Where is the change?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank you for this opportunity.

### **MEDIA INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT (REPEAL) BILL 2023**

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Media Industry Development (Repeal) Bill 2023 (Bill No. 1/2023), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2023, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Media Industry Development Act 2010, which I will refer to as the Act amongst other things, regulates the ownership, registration and content of the media organisations in Fiji. Under the Act, the Media Content Regulation Framework includes

the creation of the Media Industry Development Authority, the Media Tribunal and other elements and it is these provisions that have been considered controversial. These elements are widely considered undemocratic and in breach of the constitutional right to freedom of expression as outlined under Section 17 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to that end, the Media Industry Development (Repeal) Bill 2023 seeks to repeal the Act. This does not mean that the media organisations and reporters can now report on anything and everything without authentic sources and facts, but it does provide a start to ensuring that what reaches the ordinary people of Fiji is not limited by overbearing regulation by the government. Each person can now be guaranteed of that once the Act is repealed.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I will only speak as to why Parliament must consider the Bill without delay. It is hoped that the Members of this august Parliament will also limit their contributions, if any, to the motion and any substantive contribution to the merits of the Bill itself be made during the debate on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is really a real need to urgently repeal the Act. It does not and has not served any practical purpose other than to unnecessarily limit media organisations and their operations and the freedom of expression that is the hallmark of a democratically run country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act was promulgated as a Decree in 2010 at a time when there was no Parliament and no Opposition party to question the need for such an Act. Since the commencement of the Act almost 13 years ago, the Act has been repeatedly criticized and has been viewed as an oppressive media law.

In a public consultation held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023 at Level 9, Suvavou House, on the review of the Act, the overwhelming response from those present, specifically the media industry representatives call for the repeal of the Act, given the important role that the media plays in a democratic society and the adverse effects of the Act, it is therefore incumbent that the Act be repealed at the earliest.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the mover of the motion.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to share a few points with regards to the motion that is before Parliament, and that is a Bill to repeal the Media Industry Development Authority Act 2010 and for related matters. I will not talk about the substance of the Bill, that is subject to another debate on Thursday. I will talk about the procedure on Standing Order 51 and the use of Standing Order 51.

We all know that this Coalition Government is called the People's Coalition Government and I think we really need to go back to the people. One of the key roles of legislatures of law makers and that is to consult the people on what kind of law that is to govern them. That is the whole purpose of establishing a Standing Committee and there is this specific Committee called the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights that deals with Bills.

Last week, we heard about the Coalition Government calling themselves as a responsible government that does consultation, and this is the first example of them not doing consultation when it comes to Bills. In the last Election, and even in the last few years, they always criticised the use of Standing Order 51; you will know very well, Sir. But again, they have gone back to eat their vomit, coming in again by way of Standing Order 51. I think the mover of the Bill needs to reconsider this. Although he has done executive consultation through the Solicitor-General's Office and his

office with various media stakeholders, but it is very important to involve the people who are also stakeholders and who have a vested interest in this particular Bill.

This particular procedure needs to be followed and if we are really a responsible government, and if we are true to our words that we do consultation then let us start with the Media Bill. If you cannot start with this, then you have failed in your promise as a responsible government and that is what I am calling for as a mover of the Bill to withdraw this. At least, we can go to the Committee for the Committee to come back in the next sitting with a one month or six weeks to eight weeks consultation for people to be involved so people can be heard. Parliament has enough systems in place that allows Committees to travel outside the country and it is televised, and people give their views on all these. There may be people who have alternative views on this particular Act, but we need to allow the process as law makers and without doing that, we fail in our duty as law makers.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes we opposed the use of Standing Order 51 in the last Parliament, that is correct, because they were using Standing Order 51, you would recall and they were abusing it. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very simple. This Bill is about repealing the draconian Media Industry Development Decree, which was put forward, which was imposed on the people of Fiji by the military government and in this Constitution under Section 173 that law and amongst many others was preserved.

The Coalition Government is making it right because it is an urgent Bill. As the honourable Attorney-General talked about it, and we talked about it. For eight years we had debate and discussion on the Decree which was turned into an Act unilaterally in the previous Parliament. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is an urgent Bill and as the honourable Attorney-General said, it is going to be debated on Thursday - they have today, tomorrow and Wednesday, to go through it, rethink-their own mentality about curbing media freedom and I hope that when they come on Thursday, they will all support the Bill.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I find this quite rich in the sense that we had eight years of this Government when they were in Opposition complaining about the use of Standing Order 51.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Bills under Standing Order 51.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Again, I think someone really like the sound of his own voice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, eight years of them complaining about the use of Standing Order 51. Just for once, maybe they should practice what they preach.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We have got a lot of preachers on that side, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of them. But now, what they are doing is throwing it back in our face and saying, "Ah, you did it the way that I do it."

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



HON. F.S. KOYA.- Where is the change?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Where is the justification?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Media freedom.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister of Finance by his own admission again said that I am only going to do or take part in things that I am only supposed to because my Prime Minister directed me to do so. Maybe he should keep quite Sir, leave it to the Attorney-General, leave it to the able Attorney-General next to you.

(Honourable Prof. B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on the Bill itself, I see in the explanatory note, honourable Attorney-General right at the bottom it states and I quote:

“3.1 The new legislation comes under the responsibility of the Attorney-General.”

There is no new legislation, this is a repeal. What new legislation are you talking about? Bad drafting, I am not sure, maybe you need to check that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as rightfully pointed out by honourable Bulitavu, they have gone on about this in terms of Standing Order 51 and I just wanted to point out that there was quite a lot that was said with respect to freedom of expression, media freedom, et cetera, all those kinds of stuff.

Mr. Speaker, FijiFirst followed the Constitution. We were bound and are still bound by the law. Everyone had Freedom of Expression. Do not say they did not. But now, Sir, certain media outlets are upright against the FijiFirst. Fine, that is your freedom of expression, but even before they used to report on both sides, maybe they actually feel threatened, who knows!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Some media outlets, Mr. Speaker, actually feel threatened and they refuse to come and interview us. They are not actually doing it. So, maybe you should really look at what you actually saying, they suffer from insecurity now. Mr. Speaker, FijiFirst were called dictators.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Because they suffered under you people.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know you cannot take it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Oh, I can take it, but believe me I can give it also.

(Laughter)

But when I give it, you actually keep quiet.

Mr. Speaker, no one was actually threatened. Everyone had their freedoms guaranteed. Now, Mr. Speaker, social media commentators ...

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir.

...make comments against the FijiFirst Government that was in place, they are free to do so.

(Honourable L.D. Tabuya interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- There are blatant racist remarks made and supporters are actually doing this openly now. Fijians are told to go back to India or leave, comments such as those yet nothing is being done about it.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Shame, shame!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Nothing is being done about it. Mr. Speaker, I will just go back to the actual Bill.

Again, practice what you preach. Do not come here and procrastinate and pontificate about, “oh, you did this, did that.” All week you hear them, “you did this, you did that,” Get on with the job like honourable Usamate says. Maybe if he does not want to listen to us...

(Honourable Prof. B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.-... maybe he ought to listen to our former Prime Minister who is outside this Parliament whose telling him to get on with the job, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he should listen to him, maybe he ought to. But the point here is, now you are doing something today, it is the first Bill to come to Parliament. Eight years of complaining and what they are doing, they are not practicing what they are preaching. They go and do exactly what we did.

(Laughter)

I do not see the urgency here. The solution that has been offered by honourable Bulitavu...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We are doing exactly what is in that Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Member, I suggest you refrain from pointing at me.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You pointed.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- One man party.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, might I address, *jhoot nai bolo!*

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That was the point.

HON. MEMBERS.- One man party.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Speak up the rest of you!

Mr. Speaker, just quickly, Sir, I agree with the sentiments expressed by honourable Bilitavu, take it to the next session of Parliament. Maybe it needs to come to one Committee, that is fine. We do not have a problem with you using Standing Order 51 because this is a specific one. They had their consultations, I understand, but not with everyone. Maybe they should practice what they preach, Sir,

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, flabbergasted.

(Laughter)

Absolutely flabbergasted. Eight years I have heard this rhetoric and in their very first ever Bill, not the second, third, fourth or the tenth, but the first - flabbergasted. You speak and you do not do; absolutely flabbergasted, Sir. I have been sitting on that side of Parliament and again they keep saying and in this honourable Attorney-General's first Bill he goes against what they have been talking about. Absolutely flabbergasted, the very first Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we were in government, when we used Standing Order 51 it was either for a Consequential Amendment or a minor change - a wrong spelling here, a change of a word or something that had become outdated, we corrected it. But here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a huge change, a whole Bill being repealed. Their very first ever Bill and they go against what they have been preaching for years and years - flabbergasted and that is the colour of this Government.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Now they are hearing a lot from what they used to refer to as the silent 25.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- One man Party.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- But one thing is consistent with this Government is their inconsistency.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Because out in the public space, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they used words that entice, that are very convincing but in reality this is what is happening. I am quite disappointed, as alluded to by the honourable Members, their very first Bill, we were looking forward because we have heard it from His Excellency the President about the legislation changes. But the very first Bill is under Standing Order 51. I know why they are avoiding the consultations. I will repeat this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know why they are avoiding consultations.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Tell them, tell them.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Because the consultations that are currently undertaken in Fiji, the Fiscal Review Committee ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ...very poor attendance or no attendance at all in most places.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are talking about MIDA, the honourable Leader of the Opposition brings up the Fiscal Review Committee. They are totally different things.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- What is the Point of Order? It is the same.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Relevance irrelevant again, Mr. Speaker. We might have to bring out the dictionary to explain what relevance means to the other side of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I just ask that we stick to the discussion which is MIDA. If they listen to the results of the election, that was your answer. They do not want us to stand around and consult on the Bill. That was your answer. The answer of the people of Fiji to MIDA is, get rid of it.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Go to the people.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sir, relevance, please.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am used to his heat of the moment response. I am used to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The honourable Member talked about what had been discussed but I heard the honourable Attorney-General, I was very attentive to his words this morning. He mentioned that the consultation at Level 9, he only mentioned two groups of people - the media and academia. Where's the rest of Fiji?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Very poor!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- And talking about the inconsistency, let me say that initially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the consultations that they undertook, there was a draft already prepared but the stakeholders that came in wanted this to be totally repealed. They have a draft already, we know that. I have been asked and I said, "we will comment when it comes to Parliament." This is the inconsistencies there.

Talking about media freedom, Sir; Fijian Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) are few weeks back came up with a title of one of their responses, "Commander fires a warning shot." They were directed to take away that title. That is the media freedom that we are talking about.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. I think the honourable Leader of the Opposition is making an allegation. Does he have evidence of that? Does he have evidence that the Government directed? He does not have the evidence.

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He just blurting something which is false, misleading and irrelevant. If he has the evidence, he should produce it.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- We have raised our concerns and we will see how things develop from here, but we have taken our stance and we are here representing the people, and I am against this motion personally.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try to keep it short. This Bill under Standing Order 51, we were just informed that we need to go back and read and most of the when this kind of Bill is introduced, we get a good background information as part of the Bill itself. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this might be the first time we are repealing a Bill and the background information is just one and half line sentence. We, as the Opposition need to know the justification in background as to why the Bill is being repealed. This is what happens when we rush through things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, people's voice, people's government is on record. The honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, honourable Gavoka small amendments as just correcting the spelling error in a Bill.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That is not true.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is in the Verbatim Report. They requested it to be taken to the general public. It should be taken to the general public for consultations, small amendments as just correcting the spelling. Here, we are going to repeal a Bill.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Again, the honourable Member is lying because I was in Parliament for eight years. We never opposed the use of Standing Order to correct on any consequential bills or correct typographical error, so he is absolutely lying about that, that we were opposing it. We never opposed the use of Standing Order 51 on consequential bills and bills where there were corrections, spelling mistakes or comma, or full stop, so do not lie.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It's in the *Hansard*.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I agree, NFP never opposed. What I am talking about is former SODELPA members ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- Who makes up the government...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.-...who are part of this Government to take the Bill to the general public as consultation. I was the Chairman of Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights whereby they even requested me to intervene to take those Bills to the general public.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Shame!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are here repealing a Bill without any background information given to the Opposition as to why that is happening. As alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Government already had an amendment Bill, so they understood the importance of a Media Act at that point in time. That is why they were bringing amendments to that particular Act *per se* as a Bill to this Parliament, but just because they were put under pressure by the media and certain academics, they have opted to repeal a Bill in one single sitting.

I urge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this Bill needs to go to the general public for consultation otherwise this Bill should be thrown out of this Chambers.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Attorney-General to speak on his Reply. This is just the introduction; we will have another bite of the cherry on Thursday.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Warming up, warming up!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the last 13 years, if they listened enough, they

would have heard the clear crystal voice and the opinions from the Media Industry Development Authority and the people of Fiji. The winner here is not the FijiFirst, nor us, but the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recommend the Bill to be debated on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.

Question put.

MR. SPEAKER.- Since there is Opposition, we will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	28
Noes	-	22
Not Voted	-	3

Motion agreed to.

**iTAUKEI LAND TRUST (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023**

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) iTaukei Land Trust (Amendment) Bill 2023 (Bill No. 2/2023), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2023, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the iTaukei Land Trust (Amendment) Bill 2023 or widely known as Bill No. 17 of 2021, seeks to amend the iTaukei Land Trust Act 1940 to remove the amendment made by the iTaukei Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Act 2021. So the Act is known as Act No. 22 of 2021, which was tabled in Parliament as Bill No. 17 of 2021 and passed as an Act of Parliament (Act No. 22 of 2021) and it came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, essentially, the iTaukei Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Act 2021 amended the Act to remove the requirement of any consent from the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTLTB) for any mortgage, charge, pledge, caveat, or for any such lease to be dealt with by any court of law or under the processes of any court of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, iTaukei Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 was tabled in Parliament in 2021 under Standing Order 51 by the previous Government without having conducted extensive consultations with Land Owning Units (LOU) through the Provincial Council or the *Vanua*.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Shame!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Proper consultations with LOU were not conducted in a proper manner in 2021 and the iTaukei Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Act 2021 was rushed through during the Parliamentary process. Those that were most affected by the Act were the LOU, were not

allowed for the facilitation of the processing of mortgages, charges, caveats and pledges without the consent of the Board.

Moreover, under section 11(1) of the iTaukei Affairs Act 1944 in relation to the provision of procedure with respect to Bills affecting iTaukei, it states, and I quote:

“When any Bill is to be introduced into Parliament which appears to the Minister to affect in any important matter the rights and interests of the iTaukei, and especially any Bill imposing taxes to be paid by them or relating to their chiefs, local authorities or land, it shall first be referred to the Board for consideration.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is this Coalition Government’s interest to reverse the laws that have been tabled in Parliament under Standing Order 51 without proper consultations been conducted with members of the public or relevant stakeholders. Therefore, having consulted the LOUs and the *Vanua* through the Provincial Councils and other relevant stakeholders, this Bill is now being tabled under Standing Order 51 to reverse the amendments made by the iTaukei Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Act 2021. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to take the floor. Again, Sir, this side of Parliament opposes the use of Standing Order 51, just like the previous Bill that has been debated on procedures. On the substance, we will debate that at the time that is specified by the Mover of the motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, the importance of involving the people. Standing Order 51, according to the honourable Attorney-General, when Bill No. 2 of 2023 was Bill No. 17 of 2021...

(Hon. M.S.N. Kamikamica interjects)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Listen, honourable Minister!

... it came in as a Consequential Bill of that Budget. That is the main thing, it did not come in on separate occasion like this. It came in as Consequential Bill to the 2021-2022 Budget.

Secondly, if the honourable Attorney-General had also gone back to the history of Bill No. 17 of 2021, I think the CEO then of iTLTB also ensured the public in a press conference by iTLTB that the Board had done wider consultations throughout Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That was confirmed by the CEO of iTLTB in the media and you can go back and find that media statement that will help you. You will have your own inclinations on this particular Bill but, again, there was evidence of consultations. Even iTLTB teams that were moving around to various *Bose Ni Yasana* and *Bose Ni Tikina* and villages, were also talking about the benefits and advantages of Bill No. 17 of 2021 at that time.

It has gone worse now, Sir, given that the Mover of the motion is now proposing only a one-hour debate on the Bill which has even given more injustice, Sir. We do not have the privilege of taking this Bill to the Committee, I think, where people need to be consulted on some of the things that they have benefited from when that Bill came into place after it was passed, how some bureaucracies and other red tapes were resolved through that, especially this particular Bill only deals with the administration on the Board giving consent. But we all know that the Board sits probably two or three times in a year and that is why that amendment was brought in by iTLTB after extensive

consultations then.

But, again, I urge the honourable Attorney-General if he could withdraw the motion and come through the long passage as provided by the Standing Orders. The provisions of the Standing Orders in passing the Bill are not in the Standing Orders as a decoration. We need to consult those that need to be consulted, not only the *iTaukei* landowners but also the other stakeholders, like the banks and all those that are involved in various transactions - law firms, others that have vested interest in land transaction or transfer between the one who is selling and the other who is buying. So, there is a lot of consultation that needs to be done.

From experience, Sir, as the Member of the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights, sometimes the executive consultation is not done properly and that is why we need to have Parliament or legislative consultation through the Standing Orders Committees to follow-up on those venues and those submissions that were given to the Solicitor-General's Office and most of the time they do not confirm.

But, again, Sir, I wish that the honourable Attorney-General as the Mover of the motion, reconsider this Bill and make it a must, that this must go to the people as a responsible government, as they are saying, for people to be consulted in all the laws that will govern them.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are contributing to the debate on the pathway for this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite unreal that the other side of Parliament are saying, "We are the only ones who can use Standing Order 51, not you." That is basically what they are saying. Only FijiFirst can use Standing Order 51 and no one else.

Mr. Speaker, we sat there for eight years, and we made this point then. The tragedy with them, Mr. Speaker, was that, more than 85 percent of the Bills - the laws, came through this pathway - Standing Order 51.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- And in this one, in particular, Mr. Speaker, you will remember it came as part of Consequential Bills which could be about 20 Bills to be debated as part of the Budget. Fortunately, for us, we were able to pinpoint this and there was an outcry across the country and that made the (former) Speaker provide a special time for the debate on this Bill. Otherwise, it could have just come through as a Consequential Bill, amongst 17 or 20, and a law that was passed in 1940 relating to *iTaukei* land would have been passed in that manner.

I collected 30,000 signatures as a petition, so what other consultations do you want? The consultation was done then. I think honourable Tabuya also collected some signatures, as well as honourable Saukuru. So, if you want consultations, that has been done, all we need to do now, Mr. Speaker, is repeal this. This was an abuse, this was disrespectful of the laws relating to *iTaukei* land and it needs to be repealed quickly and the best way to do that is Thursday when we debate this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

They say that the first Bill and we are using Standing Order 51, there is a range of arsenal that we have in Parliament. It is there, Mr. Speaker, we will use them all. We will do this under Standing Order 51, we can do Standing Order 51 with time limits, and we can do proper readings - first, second and third reading. We are just starting out today and we will use all these in Parliament, Mr. Speaker, but this one needs to ...



HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Needs to go.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... go immediately. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the word ‘hypocrisy’ means, ‘I say this and I do that’. That is the point, honourable Member. That is the point - you preached it, you yelled it, you shouted about it for eight years. I am not calling you hypocrites, I am just saying that, that is the definition of hypocrisy and that is precisely the point. You talked about it. You sweated and you were so emotional. Your first two bills, the exact thing you preached about. We did not preach that, you preached it. That is hypocrisy. You are not hypocrites but that is hypocrisy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion and especially on Standing Order 51. I would like to correct some of the perceptions they are bringing out today in terms of the word ‘hypocrisy’. It is not hypocrisy because if you look at the use of Standing Order 51 when they were in Government, those were really a lot of substantial bills which they brought through.

As mentioned by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, nearly 85 percent, and it was an abuse of the process in terms of Standing Order 51.

The other issue was raised by honourable Maharaj, I do not recall what he said because we were opposing Standing Order 51 because of abuse of process and that there were Bills which were not supposed to be coming through Standing Order 51, which they were putting through. That was the main issue.

With regard to this particular Bill in front of us, it was a controversial Bill, as mentioned, there was a lot of opposition, petitions were signed, and I was picked up from home during the curfew to be taken to CID because of this. I asked them, “Why are you picking me up?” They said, “No, we are investigating you for talking on Bill No. 17, for meeting the landowners because you went around the Western Division explaining to them about the Bill and they opposed it.” For that reason, I asked the CID – why are you picking me up? They said, “Oh, it is orders from the top.” So, I was taken to CID, spent the night there and for the next five nights, I was taken in and out, in and out, so up to today, I have not been charged. So, what was that for? That is the result of your abuse of Standing Order 51. That is the problem. That is why we are bringing this up today.

The other point is that we are using Standing Order 51 not for normal Bills, but it is to repeal the Bills that have been contentious and have been opposed by the people, such as the Media Bill and Standing Order 51. There is no need to take it to them because they already opposed it. They have already expressed their views and the key stakeholders have expressed their views as well. We have already consulted them over the last 12 months regarding this. Thank you.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am reminded of that saying, listening to the utterances from the other side, it is like the pot calling the kettle black.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reassure the gallery and also the people of Fiji, that we are not making these changes lightly. This is serious business in the house. This is another problem with the other side of the House, they never listen. They never listen, Sir!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they did not listen to what the people of Fiji told them at the last Election. When we were going around during the campaign, what the people of Fiji told us in Fijian is this, *Bill 17, me lako i tuba. Na Media Decree, me lako i tuba.* What does that mean, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Minimum wages!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Do we need to meander around and talk about and drag this for another eight weeks? Absolutely not!

HON. P.K. BALA.- What about the minimum wages?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- So, Sir, what this side of the Chamber is saying is and honourable Tuisawau just mentioned, we will use Standing Order 51 sparingly and responsibly, and we will only use it where we believe the Bills have been unjust, draconian and in this case, there has been zero consultations. Absolutely zero!

Honourable Gavoka and honourable Qereqeretabua just reminded me, that consultations happened after the Bill was passed. What a nonsense!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like to assure this Parliament and I would also like to assure my colleagues on the other side and the honourable Leader of the Opposition, we will use Standing Order 51 responsibly and you can quote me. For these two Bills, these are wrong Bills. They should not exist in a proper democracy.

Sir, I just thought I would assure all of us, we can talk again for a couple of minutes but from this side of Parliament, these two Bills are gone. *Vinaka saka valevu.*

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Member for his contribution and for listening to the people. But what we have also heard from the people saying to the other side, “Increase the minimum wage.” Increase the sugarcane price. Bring the Rakiraki sugar Mill back.” So, just a reminder to the other side that those were also said by the general public.

Mr. Speaker, on Standing Order 51, I believe this is an Act now and is already in place. What we are actually suggesting from this side of Parliament is that we do not oppose Standing Order 51. We have been using it, and we will support it when the need arises to use Standing Order 51, there is no doubt about that.

But what we are saying, Mr. Speaker, is that there was an Act that was in place. Before it is repealed, there needs to be two kinds of consultation. Firstly, the consultation by the Government and when it actually comes to the Chambers, Standing Order 51 allows 30 days. It goes to the Standing Order Committee, the Committee can go and do a consultation, come back with the report and if the people want it to be repealed or amended, we can do it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is a legislative procedure in place that allows, under Standing Order 51, for the Bills to be referred for further consultation to the general public. That is all we are saying, Sir. There is a process in place and Standing Order 51 does allow it and that is what we are requesting. Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just very briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Members on the other side need to understand that this is a repeal of two Bills. We are not making a new law. What we are saying is that, both the laws that we are trying to repeal were made in the circumstances where there was no consultation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one was made under the Military Government to suppress the media. This Bill was brought into Parliament and after it was tabled, like honourable Tuisawau, I opposed the Bill on the basis that proper consultation was not done according to the Act and we were hauled up from home during COVID-19 in the night, taken to the police station, and I asked the same question

and said, “This is my legitimate right as a Member of Parliament to talk about the Bill that is before Parliament, why are you taking me for?” And they said, and I quote, “Sir, we cannot tell you, but this is orders from the top”. I was taken four or five times, I think.

Mr. Speaker, all we are doing, using Standing Order 51, is to say, “The process through which those laws came in was wrong, it should have never been done”, and we are simply saying, “This is going to be repealed”. So, it is not making a new law.

Honourable Kamikamica said that we are not going to abuse the use of Standing Order 51. We have said this, and I think honourable Members need to understand and support the Bill.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, since we have just started this Parliament, we have been hearing from the Opposition saying to us, “Get on with the job. What are you doing in your 100 days? Where are your promises?” These were promises by this Coalition Government. So, we are doing our job, we are getting on with it. Yes, the 100 days you are saying is about to be up...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Standing Order 51 is the only way to do it, now let us do our job. We are getting on with it and we are keeping our word and we want to tell the people of Fiji, yes, both Bills will be repealed they need to go and we are keeping our promises. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Attorney-General to speak in Reply.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a reference made by honourable Bilitavu whether the Association of Banks were consulted or not, they were. There is a letter that I am going to read to you dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2023, addressed to the Solicitor-General, and I quote:

“Please note, the Association of Banks of Fiji does not have any objection to the draft Bills subject to the following –

- (a) All charges taken over the iTLTB leases during the transitional period is deemed to have acquired the consent and will be legally enforced.
- (b) All applications received during the transitional period which may or may not have been registered yet, and after the date of commencement of the revised Bill will not require consent in line with the existing Bill and until the revised Bill is enacted.”

So, we have consulted the key stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just hearing from the other side, when this Bill was debated or rushed through Parliament you also, Sir, a paramount chief, sat here and you opposed the Bill because you very well know the administration of land by virtue of your traditional title.

What has been going on is that the FijiFirst Party needs to get their consciousness right. The whole of Fiji supports this and the Coalition Government, as said by my colleagues, we endorse this Bill.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Well, take it to the Committee.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Thank you, Sir.

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

Question put.

MR. SPEAKER.- Since there is Opposition, we will vote on the motion.

Votes cast

Ayes	-	29
Noes	-	22
Not voted	-	2

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we move on to the next item on the Agenda, I will adjourn Parliament for lunch and resume when the bell is sounded. The Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.58 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.34 p.m.

## **REVIEW REPORT - WATER AUTHORITY OF FIJI 2017 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the Water Authority of Fiji 2017 Annual Report which was tabled on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2022.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament, on behalf of the former and current honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regard to the Committee's Report on the 2017 Annual Review of the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) which was tabled in Parliament by the former Chairperson of the Committee, honourable Sanjay Kirpal, on Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.

The WAF is a Commercial Statutory Authority (CSA) that was formed by the Government of Fiji under the WAF Promulgation 2007 to provide environmentally sound, sustainable, efficient, and effective water and wastewater services. The WAF has continued to deliver its core responsibility of providing clean, safe, reliable water to all Fijians.

The Committee commends the WAF for the significant achievement highlighted in 2017 despite the challenges faced, that is, the aftermath of *TC Winston*. In its review, the WAF continued to drive towards service excellence in delivering clean water and sanitation for all Fijians embedded in its Strategic Plan 2017 - 2019. In addition, WAF continued to build on the knowledge of its employees from time to time with the present experience, in line with the Fijian Government's goals to pave the way for the future.

One of the highlights of WAF in 2017 was the achievement of SDG6 which states "access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities to urban, rural and maritime populations."

The Committee commends the Authority for its achievements and initiatives in the 2017 fiscal year. Furthermore, under the 2017 budget, one of the highlights of the WAF, the government continued funding on three free initiatives:

- (1) Free Water Allowance for households with incomes under \$30,000, Rainwater Harvesting and Free Water tanks for intermittent supply areas.
- (2) Free Water Allowance Under this scheme, customers are provided with 91,250 litres of water free annually. Customers that exceed this amount will have to pay for their extra usage.
- (3) Free Water Tanks distribution is mostly distributed to rural and intermittent supply areas. Key requirements for the household applying is to build a water tank base and have roof guttering in place to meet the criteria for approval.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bipartisan Committee Report examines, compares and analyses the performance of the Water Authority administration, legislation, organisational structure, financial management, functions and programmes.

The Committee, following its scrutiny of the Annual Reports, made the following recommendations:

- (1) The Committee recommends that WAF provides timely submission of annual reports to Parliament.
- (2) The Committee recommends that WAF adheres to the 2020 - 2025 Strategic Plan.
- (3) Government to consider decreasing duty and taxation on imports of machines used in quick fix and waste management, that is, pulverizes, mulchers, compactors, crushers, shredders and extruders.
- (4) Ensure stakeholders involve enforcement officers to monitor trade waste intrusion into waterways particularly in industrial areas.
- (5) The WAF to provide a gender breakdown in its future annual report.

Overall, the Committee was satisfied with the performance of the WAF in 2017.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and before I offer the floor, I wish to inform you that I have a list provided by the Whips of the Opposition and the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. There are seven speakers and the order is as folloed:

- (1) Honourable J. Usamate;
- (2) Honourable R.R. Sharma;
- (3) Honourable A. Bia;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications; and
- (5) Honourable P.K. Bala.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to talk on this motion. I would like to congratulate the Standing Committee on Natural Resources those that were initially part of the development of the Report and the Committee that has now taken over in putting the Report together on Water Authority of Fiji (WAF). As we get to this year, Sir, this year will be the 13<sup>th</sup> year, if I am not mistaken over the Water Authority of Fiji having been in place, as a solution that was put in place to try to strengthen the distribution of clean and safe water and to deal with sanitation issues.

As the Report has highlighted, it has had two development Strategic Development Plans, the one from 2017 and we have heard of the one that has now been in place from 2022 to 2025. Now the recent discussions that have taken place on the 2050 Plan. So, it looks like that the Water Authority of Fiji as has been mentioned in Parliament, the kind of issues that they need to address are big issues that they need to prepare over a significant portion of time.

Looking at some of the major highlights of the plan, WAF launching its new plan and as I have mentioned, they also have a new 2022 to 2025 Strategic Development Plan. I was very glad to see the money that WAF was able to get from the ADB for the work that it has done on Greenhouse Gas Reduction. This is an issue that has been discussed at great length in the past, there has been talk about getting electricity out of that methane out of Kinoya.

It would be interesting to learn from the honourable Minister later on today whether there have been any more plans on taking that forward to the next step. I think it will be to our benefit if those greenhouse gas emissions that are going out into the atmosphere in Kinoya and other places can be turned and used in a manner that is useful for everyone in this country, and at the same time reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

I have noticed with pleasure the awards that was given to WAF for the 2017 Global Water Awards for its Water Champion Programme that I think has had a powerful impact on this country,

in telling people about the importance of using water well, conservation of water and teaching our students in schools. I think that might be partially responsible for some of the trends that we have seen that the average water usage of individuals has declined slightly over the years as people have become a bit more used to dealing with water well.

Sir, WAF has been highlighted in the Report as the first water utility in the Asia Pacific region to pilot the Aqua Rating; a utility benchmarking tool. I think this has been a very good development because if you are going to look at things like production of water, you cannot just look at the technical issues. You have to look at the whole kind of things that are covered in these sort of analysis; change management, strategic planning, innovation, knowledge management and continuous improvement because as they keep on dealing with problems, they want to learn from them, change the way that they do things so that they can keep improving for the benefit of our people.

I would just like to speak very briefly to the submissions to the recommendation. It is recommended timely submission of annual reports. I noticed from their website that the 2018-2019 Annual Reports were supposed to have been available around this time, hopefully we can get an update from the honourable Minister on when those might be coming up to Parliament.

In the second recommendation, this is one recommendation that I would like to spend a bit of time on. It suggests that the WAF adhere to the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, but during this past week, we have heard about the 2050 strategy. I also mentioned earlier this morning that in either September or October last year, there was also an analysis done by Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) looking at all the member utilities of the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association in Fiji.

That particular report was presented at the Pacific Water and Wastewater Forum (WWA) held in Denarau towards the end of last year, and it looked at how well our utility is doing vis-à-vis other utilities around the world. As a result of that, the outcome of that particular report was an action plan on SDG6 which is on Water. I am also interested to hear what the progress has been, how the WAF is thinking about incorporating the findings of that assessment into their existing strategic plan or annual operational plans that they might have right now, moving forward.

Some of the interesting things that came out at the Pacific WWA Report, as I mentioned earlier, one of the challenges that this greater Suva area faces is that every year, the number of consumers increases by 2.5 percent. That has been true from the period 2012 to 2019 or to 2020. That means your infrastructure is the same, but the number of people is increasing. That is a reflection probably of two things in this urban area – the continuing rural to urban migration drift which happened years ago, but it is still occurring now. It might also be a reflection of the changing of our city boundaries which means that more people are coming to the urban areas.

As we know, a lot of people in our urban areas are in informal settlements. Normally, WAF gives water to places where you have ownership of that land, but there are special provisions that they make for these informal settlements. That is going to be a challenge for us. We know now at the moment that not all of our households are able to receive 24/7 water supply and there are areas that receive considerably less than that.

In 2013, WAF had actually identified 68 areas with intermittent supply. That means they get water sometimes, other times they do not get it. At the moment for me in Nakasi, for the past three weeks or so, we have had intermittent water supply, so WAF had identified these areas and then started trying to address these intermittent water supply areas so that they could be improved. That was reduced to 50 in 2014 and around 23 areas in 2015. In 2016, the number has gone down and we look forward to hearing from the honourable Minister how they intend to be able to continue to drive

down the number of areas that have those intermittent water supplies.

One of the other things that the report noted was that it has become noticeable in the continuity of supply, which has increased from an average of 20 to 22 hours per day. There are 24 hours per day but on average people are getting water in these areas up to 22 hours per day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are still challenges in terms of water quality. It has improved over the years from 2012 going up to the recent parts and I think up to 2020, compliance had gone up to 93 percent. There are still some issues that we need to improve on. We understand that WAF is very closely monitoring the performance on this indicator on the various regions, and we hope that eventually we will get to the 100 percent benchmark that we need for all the people that we have in Fiji.

One of the challenges also has been faced in WAF is faced by a lot of other utilities are the number of complaints that are received and the percentage at which complaints are resolved. The number of complaints as a percentage of total number of connections has continued to increase over the years. Part of this might be due to the fact that now WAF has a 24/7 call centre. When you have a 24/7 call centre, there is a likelihood that you get more complaints, so you might be getting a more accurate read of the number of complaints that we have. We know that WAF's policy is to respond to each complaint within 72 hours, so we hope and look forward to that continuing to improve into the future.

One major issue that has always been a challenge for WAF is non-revenue water. That is water that WAF produces but which they do not collect revenue on. It has been a challenge over the years, I remember when I first had the opportunity to take up the role of Minister for Infrastructure, it had come down to around 27 percent. Now, I think it is hovering at around 50 percent, there are a lot of complex issues that affects non-revenue water. When you have a lot of firefighting to do, you move people away from dealing with the non-revenue water and you focus them on the problems of today, so being able to manage the problems of today with the more larger size problems that you have for non-revenue water, that becomes an issue that needs to be balanced.

But it is something that needs to be done; non-revenue water must go down. If you are able to reduce non-revenue water, then there will be automatically enough water in the system for everyone to be able to drink. I think probably at the moment, non-revenue water is sitting at around 49 percent and that is something that we hope will go down in the future, and it needs to go down.

Sir, WAF provides a reasonable level of service but is not yet able to provide the service level of targets stated in its customer charter. This is something that WAF has been working on over the years, it has been improving on, but it is still something that needs to be addressed into the near future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the big challenges that will be with us into the future is the number of people that we have in our urban areas. It is good that Viria is coming online, eventually it will resolve a lot of these issues, but nevertheless it will be something that we still have to keep a watch on.

Recommendation 3 is for Government to consider decreasing duty and taxation on imports of machines used in quick fix and waste management, that is, pulverizers, mulchers, compactors, crushers, shredders and extruders. I think that is something that the honourable Minister of Finance will be looking at in terms of his fiscal review strategy that unfortunately, not too many people have been attending the meetings, but hopefully they will be able to address those into the future.



For number four, it talks about another serious problem in WAF, and this is the monitoring trade waste intrusion into the waterways. A lot of stuff that is coming into the sewerage system are not supposed to be there, so that has been a major challenge. I know that WAF are doing the smoke test and I had actually participated in some of these to try to get rid of all the illegal things that are coming into the sewerage systems of WAF.

I think they now have some teeth where they can go after people, but we encourage everyone in Fiji to make sure that the stuff that you put into your wastewater or sewer are the stuff that are supposed to be there and not anything else, not stormwater, not waste from factories, not waste from commercial entities. It needs to be the right stuff because if you get the wrong stuff in the sewerage areas, then we get poor processing of water, your electricity bills go up because your machines have to work harder, and it is a cost on WAF.

One of the biggest problems with WAF at the moment unlike EFL which is completely self-financing, WAF relies on the Government of Fiji. It is possible to build WAF to a level where it can be self-financing. This is one of the things that we have been able to do for EFL, which can go out on its own and borrow money; WAF is still not in that position. Those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are some of the things that I wanted to share some comments on in relation to this Report.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the review Report of the Water Authority of Fiji 2017 Annual Report. I would like to thank the honourable Members of this Committee for compiling this Report. Mr. Speaker, Sir, water is a necessity for life on earth but there is not enough water for everyone while our planet has 70 percent of water available, 90 percent is salty, 2 percent is frozen, and 1 percent is available for drinking water. Today, more than over 800 million people do not have access to clean drinking water. As populations increase, the need for clean drinking water increases as well.

The rural urban drift is a complex and multifaceted phenomena that is shaped by a wide range of economic, social and environmental factors. In the Central Division, we have seen the prolific increase in population by 2.5 percent and this has caused a huge demand for basic necessities, resources, goods and services, in particular the need for continuous water supply to every household.

The FijiFirst Government realised the growing challenges linked to degraded water, related ecosystems, water stress, water scarcity and damaged pipelines caused by external factors which has been further exacerbated by climate change. But as water stress exacerbated, the FijiFirst Government had to ensure that water was provided by the cartage services, water tanks were distributed, and prior notice was given for water disruptions. I would like to sincerely thank the staff of Water Authority of Fiji for the commendable efforts and years of dedication in their service to the people of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the initiation of the Viria Water Project is a key achievement under the FijiFirst Government's leadership. The project is forecasted to benefit about 300,000 to 360,000 Fijians. The project is mid-way through completion and the plans are to increase water services to villages along the Rewa pipeline.

The key targets are to achieve equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. Now, we and the people of the Suva and Nausori corridor have high hopes with the Coalition Government for the completion of this project and this will benefit almost one-third of our population.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, something I would urge the people of this nation is to practice

self-sustainability in terms of water collection and storage. Rainwater harvesting has been practiced for thousands of years and it is an effective and sustainable way to manage the water supply and demand and it can have many positive impacts on both the environment and people's lives.

Mr. Speaker, while the honourable Minister for Public Works has expressed his ambitious plans, I would like to share with him the voices and concerns of our Fijian citizens in regard to water shortages and uninformed water disruption notices from yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Josephine from Lautoka said, "In the Kashmir area, Lautoka we have not had water since Saturday morning till now" and that was Sunday. Shania from 8 miles said, "Usually water cuts off at 9.00 p.m. but today it was at 5.00 p.m."

Shaneel from Nausori said, "The water trucks come to people who they know, if we request for water, they say that not much water is left. My neighbour has a water tank, they repeatedly called them to fill their tank but it has not come for more than two weeks." This is something that the honourable Minister can look into.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what's really funny that this Coalition Government calls themselves the "People's Government." Where were the people when they held their Fiscal Review Committee Consultations? There were five, 10 – we have a population of over 800,000.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Tell them, tell them!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the Coalition Government is attending to fix these delays, there are many delays because a lot of promises were made, or whether there is delay in paying the TELS loans and telling the tertiary students we did it, or whether there is the delay of fixing the roads and its maintenance or whether the delay of responding to water shortages to at least tell the team to give prior notice to the people of this country so they can prepare. The Coalition Government, the people of this country are waiting upon you.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the review of the Water Authority of Fiji 2017 Annual Report. The Committee noted that the Authority continues to show commitment in growth in providing all Fijians access to better and efficiency in delivery as per SDG6 – Clean Water and Sanitation. Overall, the performance of the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) during the period under review was very satisfactory despite the existing aged underground pipes and infrastructure and the fluctuating system pressure throughout the network.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the previous Members of the Committee proceeded with its deliberation on the Water Authority of Fiji 2017 Annual Report and collected written evidence from the Authority. The evidence collected were written responses from the WAF and in response to the written questions put forth by the Committee Members. Pertinent questions on issues relating to the operations of the Authority in 2017 were raised by the Committee Members which were then collated as Committee Findings to be presented to Parliament for enactment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee is very grateful to WAF for undertaking an approach to build up on the future of employee knowledge over time together with the Fijian Government's goal to pave the way for the future. The drive towards service excellence in delivering clean water and sanitation for all Fijians is the central guiding theme of the Strategic Plan 2017-2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me dwell on some of the key findings of the report which are as follows:

1. Outdated Annual Report.

2. In 2017, Water Authority of Fiji launched its Strategic Plan 2017-2019. However, the Committee noted that Water Authority of Fiji has its new Strategic Plan for 2020-2025.
3. There is a need for mechanisation to enhance service delivery. Water Authority of Fiji to consider purchasing their own machinery, for quick fix and waste management.
4. The Water Authority of Fiji focus on liquid trade waste that has been raised on awareness and provide advice to ensure that businesses are aware of these business obligations.
5. The Committee noted that there was no gender breakdown provided in the 2017 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very encouraging to note that WAF is using all its available resources to ensure that all the issues highlighted in the findings are adequately attended and appropriately addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the Committee's recommendations is for the Government to consider decreasing duty and taxation on imports of machines used in quick fix and waste management, that is, pulverisers, mulchers, compactors, crushers, shredders and extruders. This will not only help WAF to fix the ageing infrastructure, but to minimise the frequent water cuts we have been experiencing for some time now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff of WAF in all the Divisions for the enormous work been done under pressure to meet the demands of our citizens on a daily basis. I fully support the motion before the Chambers.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my contribution on the Report that is before Parliament. At this juncture, I would like to extend my congratulations also and I think it is fitting that Parliament offer their congratulations to the Fijiana Team and Fijian Drua for their last week. What a display of brilliance and flare. It brought smiles to all the people of Fiji and Fijians around the globe. Also, to the Fijiana and Fijian 7s Team, last night, I believe some were disappointed, but we hope that they will be able to regroup this weekend and come out strong again for the people of Fiji.

I would like to also take this time to thank the previous Committee and the current Committee Members for a thorough and more detailed Report that is offered in Parliament today. According to the Report, the period under review was satisfactory, despite the existing aged underground pipes and infrastructure with the fluctuating system pressure throughout the network, and that was also evident in the way the former Chairman, honourable Kirpal, offered a statement in their Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the major highlights and achievements that have shown in the Report, a notable one was the fact that Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) is the first water utility in the Asia Pacific Region to pilot the aqua rating. This was really beneficial because this tool helps WAF to assess how it is performing across all its operational areas with the results benchmarked against other utilities that are in the aqua rating system. So, somehow, it offers a good picture of where the service that has been provided by WAF in the years that is under the review in the Report is

Water cut is a major problem in our communities and in our everyday life. I thank the honourable Minister, who has made his earlier Ministerial Statement this morning, as well as the reply from this side of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just my observation so far, if we continue with this basic necessity need that is out there, it is an everyday occurrence, if we continue to come and pinpoint what we have done and the loopholes that have occurred for the past 16 years, I wanted to say that we will not be determined or the way we see our leadership, according to what had happened in the past. What we

can do is, what we will be remembered after our service in this Parliament.

I thank the honourable Minister responsible on the other side and just a suggestion, building community capacity of how we can support ourselves and at the same time, wait for Government to find permanent solutions of how we can solve water issues. It is an occurrence everyday and we cannot afford to continue to implement projects and ideas that will take years to complete, when people do suffer on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an idea and an observation that has come to mind and one of the innovative ways of addressing water issues within our communities, without much cost, is a scenario just like the NDMO. They have evacuation centres organised throughout the country, and an idea that has come to my mind, and I think the Committee will take this on board too, why not the WAF take the list of those evacuation centres, set up may be, three water tanks in each evacuation centre, so just like a disaster, when the NDMO activates the evacuation centres, when there is unplanned water cuts, WAF can also activate these three water tanks may be in all the evacuation centres that are in the list with NDMO so that the public can access when there is unplanned or planned water cut by the WAF. I think that is also a suggestion that the Committee can take on board.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend and render my full support to the Report before Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to offer some contributions to the Report on the review of the Water Authority of Fiji 2017 Annual Report, as tabled by the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. Perhaps, I will compartmentalise my small contribution in a couple of parts.

One is, I thought I just share some broader thoughts because of my profession and just after being here for a week, just thinking through some of the work that we are doing in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I have been looking at the Reports that we have been considering, they are quite old Reports. This one is from 2017. I wonder whether as a group, who is responsible for the leadership of our country to ask ourselves, should we be discussing outdated reports in this august Chamber, as Members of Parliament, as representatives of our people?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It's the requirement.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I know that, but allow me to finish.

Sir, I just thought I would share that as a question to all of us, because it is important that whatever we discuss in this Parliament, is relevant, and I have been mentioning relevance a little bit today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an accountant, when I am talking about something in 2017 in 2023, it is absolutely irrelevant, I am afraid. I just thought I would share that with all of us, just to have a serious thought about what some of the functions we are carrying out in Parliament. Perhaps, as a suggestion to all of us, we can allow the Standing Committees to try and do a catch up on all the reports, so that if we accept where we need to go with these reports, maybe we do a catchup from 2017 up to 2021.

We discuss that and so we start talking about things on relevant basis. I have been told it is in accordance with the law, but we are here to lead and provide guidance in this country. So, I just thought I would share that as an opening remark regarding this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was quite intrigued when the Report talked about WAF, they have used the acronym “A” and it stands for accountability. Just to re-enforce my point, if we are to be accountable, we need to encourage entities such as WAF that we are providing good taxpayers’ money to, to be accountable and make sure that their reports are on a timely basis.

I totally agree with the comments of the Committee, we should not accept untimely reports. Why? Because it talks about wider issues, Sir. As an accountant, when people cannot submit good information on time, that suggests that there is a problem. Simple, very simple. So, going forward, I hope we can all discuss as a group in this august Parliament on how we can make these reports relevant so that when we discuss in Parliament, we are discussing things that affect real time future rather than historical reports.

I, kind of, smiled when honourable Sharma started throwing some small stones at the honourable Minister for Public Works regarding some complaints arising from Lautoka.

Sir, I think all agree in this Parliament that water is a challenging issue. It has been an issue and from this side of Parliament, it could have been managed a bit better. Sir, 16 years, and the honourable Minister for Public Works and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance have told us that there have been leakages happening in this country for all this time. I heard this in 2018, I think, and we have never been told publicly that that is an issue, that water is leaking from our systems up to 50 percent. Am I right?

HON. J. USAMATE.- It has always been there in the Annual Reports.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- But you have not disclosed it to the public of Fiji.

HON. J.N. NAND.- It is in the Annual Reports.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You have not disclosed it to the public of Fiji. Why? Because you know it is unpopular and you need to be, like us on our side, full disclosure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think sometimes honourable Sharma who was speaking on it too, to be fair in defence of my colleague, I know that when we call him about issues, they get dealt with in less than eight hours or 12 hours, and it is part of larger problems, which we all have to accept and own as Members of this Parliament. But, like I said, 16 years, surely, we could have been in a better place in 16 years.

Just before I sit down, Sir, I thought I just share a little story about efficiency that I have shared with the honourable Minister for Public Works. For WAF, ‘F’ stands for financially efficient and effective service delivery. So, my family has a small business venture in Dravo and right now because of the water cuts, we have to call for water to be supplied to the village. To do that exercise, our manager in the village has to get up in the morning when there is shortage of water in the tanks, go to Laucala Beach at R.B. Patel Centrepont where WAF is based, pay \$266 for the water, take that receipt and go back to Nausori, hand it to the Depot in Nausori and then go and wait in the village for the water to be delivered. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it took 16 years.

Honourable Usamate said flabbergasted, I would return and say, that is quite flabbergasting. We have been advising people, but no one is listening, so we just decided to continue. I guess, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I am saying is, there is a wider issue here and there are still things to sort out.

Honourable Professor Prasad talked about the sewerage issues in our country and 38 wastewater systems need to be fixed. We never heard about this. I know it is easy to cast stones, but

I think what we have to collectively agree in this Parliament is that there are major issues that need to be sorted out. I can see from the great work that our honourable Minister is doing, that he is doing his utmost to firefight first, whilst he tries to resolve the issues on a medium to long term basis and, of course, with funding from our honourable Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst I support this, I just thought I would offer some, if you like, words of wisdom from myself in terms of the timeliness of the reports, and I truly hope that perhaps, the Business Committee can discuss it because ultimately, if we are in this Parliament, we need to remain relevant to the people of our country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor to honourable Bala, I wish to remind honourable Members that there have been constant delays in the submission of Annual Reports to Parliament. Most of these Reports were never completely concluded during the past Government's term. So they have resurrected, we have passed it in this Parliament and as such, we are now discussing Reports that have been delayed but yet, it still needs to be brought to the attention of Parliament because of taxpayers' funds that had been utilised.

Your observation is commendable, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, but may be that is something for the Business Committee to sort out. How do they take all the delayed Annual Reports that are before them and lump it all into one and then present it. It will be the same thing. That is my view, but the observation is commendable and is noted.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I wish to correct the incorrect statement by the honourable Minister of Finance on Thursday that I did not release the payment for the Lagilagi Housing Project, and I was not in Parliament on that day. It is unfortunate for the honourable Minister of Finance to mislead this Parliament because I do not release payments. During those times in our Ministerial portfolio, we do not release payment.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. P.K. BALA.- It is the Permanent Secretary that releases the payment.

Mr. Speaker, for him to come here and mislead Parliament, is not a correct one. I just want to put it on record.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to make my brief contribution on the deliberation in this Parliament on the review of the Water Authority of Fiji's 2017 Annual Report. Water is an essential of life and its provision in safe and reliable means to people as one of the key priority areas of all governments.

The Standing Committee review of the Annual Report highlights this as a key priority initiative that gives back to the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF). Mr. Speaker, Sir, even as we speak, water issues affect people. During the *Ram Navami*, which we all wished everyone a happy *Ram Navami*, but for the people who celebrated was a bad *Ram Navami* for them because there was no water, and so many people called us and said, "Please, help us with the water." I directed few people to certain agencies, but they were told to go and buy their own water tanks. So, I hope the honourable Minister for Public Works, who is responsible for water, will look into this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the past months, as with everything else, the Coalition Government has spent a lot of time putting the blame on water issues to the FijiFirst Government. It seems that there was no history to water infrastructure until the FijiFirst came into power. I remember during my tenure, I had first-hand experience and learnt from the experts on the long history of infrastructure shortcomings when it came to water in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issues of aged and out of date infrastructure in the water sector goes back to the lack of investment that began in the pre-Independence era. The issues did not suddenly fall from the sky when the FijiFirst Government came into power in 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Report points out in the main, it was satisfied with the work and delivery outputs of WAF. Now, I am told that honourable Minister wants to remove the Board. But by removing the Board, will it solve the problem? Good luck to you, honourable Minister.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a general agreement, as they should be in this Parliament, that we have issues with infrastructure, and we need to have a plan to fix it. Moving forward, this is an area that will need bipartisan input so that we can get up to speed in upgrading the infrastructure. The FijiFirst Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, invested heavily in this area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to read out what the honourable Minister of Finance said few weeks ago about this Viria Project and I am happy with your statement. In fact, there is some truth in it. I know this project is designed so he is accepting, the design is well and good - design to the vital infrastructure and services which is, again, vital for supporting growth and sustainable development in the Greater Suva-Nausori area. I hope that when it is completed in May 2023, it will resolve and aid the support development within the Suva-Nausori corridors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this project could have finished earlier on but as we all know that this project was heavily impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, otherwise this project could have been commissioned. Apart from the ongoing reticulation upgrades, the FijiFirst Government had an extensive programme of spreading mains water to rural areas, as well as having targeted water delivery programmes for remote, rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the WAF, as per the Review Report, has been heavily involved in this evident dimension of the 17 rural programmes under WAF which was earlier on mentioned by my colleague.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Report also noted a number of green energy and climate initiatives by WAF. We should not forget that WAF, under the FijiFirst Government's direction, achieved many milestones in these areas as noted in the Review Report. Few of them, includes:

- (1) Carbon Credit for Greenhouse Gas Reduction where WAF claimed \$350,000 from ADB by reducing emissions at 22,000 tonnes.
- (2) It received an award, as mentioned earlier on by my colleague, at the 2017 Global Water Awards for its Water Champion Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government, through its effort, enabled the WAF to receive a US\$31 million grant from the Green Climate Fund - a component towards the US\$405 million investment from the Fijian Government, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and European Investment Bank (EIB) to develop the Suva-Nausori Water Supplies System.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister of Finance also mentioned in that brief that \$1.12 million was given to WAF for the past five years. But all this time, he has been talking and saying that the country is in \$10 million debt for the last 10 years. So, \$1 billion or whatever is now with WAF. We will also give some justification for the balance of \$9 million in the coming months, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the system which is still in the process will result in greatly improved water services for close to 400,000 people in most populated corridors, as per the Review Report. It is

important that we note that these achievements were made possible by the policy, directions and oversight provided to the WAF under the FijiFirst Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that instead of sitting on our backsides and complaining about the problems from the past Government, we from the FijiFirst Government, never blamed about the past Government at that time. You know, Mr. Speaker, you were sitting there, you know.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- *Bhatao.*

The FijiFirst Government went out and initiated long term solutions using best available practice, as is evident in the Report. I am just saying whatever is in the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I would like to thank you for this opportunity and I want to wish the honourable Minister all the best in the water issue that we have. If you need some assistance, please, let us now. We have been in the system, as I have said, we need to have a bipartisan....

(Hon. Ro F.Q. Tuisawau interjected)

HON. P.K. KUMAR.- Not really, but just to help you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- I now offer the floor to the honourable Leader of Opposition. There has been a slight reshuffle.

HON. I.B. SERURATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will do my best to stick within the two minutes that I have requested for a short contribution. I will not repeat what has been discussed but perhaps, I will just make four recommendations which the Government can perhaps consider seriously, given the issues that is common to water.

My first recommendation, I will urge this, through the honourable Ministers and honourable Prime Minister is the Water Harvesting Policy. We are providing water tanks for our people but some seem to think that this is only for our people in the rural areas.

To save a lot of money for Government and perhaps, it is a question of affordability as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will be good if we, who live within the urban areas, if we can have a water tank each for every household because it will save a lot of money for Government.

I hope that the Rainwater Harvesting Policy and its funding will continue but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I make also a recommendation and the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management would already be aware with the Programme that we started with the UNDP called Risk Informed Development. Let us not only provide water tanks for the sake of providing water tanks.

Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, a key lesson learnt from the past, we go and give people water tanks, but it is not protected. After every cyclone, the honourable Minister and I know this very well, we have to replace these tanks because they were simply damaged from flying debris and everything. So, with the Risk Informed Development, we are now providing protection to the tanks and that is very important for us. It will save a lot of money in the long terms.



My second recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is Ecological Purification Systems (EPS). Honourable Prime Minister, you are aware, Sir, that most of the water projects that were constructed from the 1950s, 1960s or whatever, are still in the same state today. They are not purified and treated.

Our people are drinking straight from the source and Government has already initiated this EPS, Sir. It is a simple purification system that, of course, gets rid of bacteria. It only uses sand and stones. If you drive past Nanuca Village, Sir, on your way to your village, you have an excellent example of an EPS in Nanuca Village. And that has been replicated almost in most parts of Fiji but large majority of Fijians are still drinking straight from the source from those days until today. It is going to take time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope that Government can pick this up and continue with it.

The third recommendation is what we call the Package Plants. That is, again, is important to the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management in terms of responding during disasters and, of course, to everyone because water is a basic need.

What is a Package Plant? You have a Containerised Processing System that you can just lift to the bank of any stream or whatever and you suck the water, regardless of the state of the water. Turbidity or whatever does not matter. You extract the water, it is treated within that container and then on the hand, delivery trucks can come, they fill the water tanks, that is treated water going out. During our time we only managed two, we bought it, and I have always tried as Minister responsible for Disaster if we can have one or two in every major towns and cities and then have a strategic reserve. But these package plants are very, very important for us in the long-term, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

May I just also highlight about the need for these ecological purification systems and also these package plants. Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, for your information, two Budgets from 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the Ministry of Rural Development also now have an allocation called the “High Risk and Water Sanitation allocation”. Initially, it was with the Ministry of Infrastructure for WAF to use that, but because of the utilisation, it was slow because they have other major commitments, it has been transferred to the Ministry of Rural Development - High Risk Water and Sanitation.

Sir, this is based on the data that we receive from the Ministry of Health on Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD). It is a common problem in Fiji, a lot of places still have leptospirosis, typhoid and dengue and likewise post-disasters when water service is affected, these becomes very important. I hope that the programme on High Risk Water and Sanitation can be continued so that we can address some of those issues. Those are my recommendations and thank you for this opportunity.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Committee for the Report on the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report for 2017 and I also note the contribution from the honourable Members. If I can just speak on what the very important point that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica made with respect to timeliness of presenting annual reports and financial reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the point of view of efficiency and managing budgets, allocating budgets and appropriate budgets, it is very important for this Parliament to receive annual reports, financial reports on a timely basis so the Office of the Auditor-General can look at that. That report can be looked at by the Standing Committee, it comes to Parliament and it gives Government and Parliament a better sense of performance of those entities and how we can allocate budgets which can lead to more efficiency and timeliness of addressing those and I think it is a very important point.

One of the things that we saw over the last eight years that I have been in Parliament and under the Military Government before that, today for example, we are looking at a report which is five years old and constantly over the last eight years, we kept reminding the previous Government on the importance of those reports. I think, as a government, we want to ensure (I am sure all the honourable Ministers on this side are concerned about that) and we will make sure that we get some of these reports on a timely basis. We can have some delays here and there but not things like five years delay. We will be working on ensuring that we get timely annual reports, financial reports so that the Office of the Auditor-General can look at them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to inform Parliament, I know honourable Bala talked about the budget. The Water Authority of Fiji over the last six years has been provided approximately \$1.5 billion and of that, \$511.3 million was just for operating expenditure and \$922.6 million was for capital infrastructure and a significant portion of that is for the Viria Water Project and we acknowledge that project.

The honourable Members are right that once that comes on board around May, it is going solve major water problems that we had over the last so many years. I know honourable Usamate talked about the non-revenue water - that is correct. I think it has been a problem for a long time. That also means that we are losing not only just the timeliness and appropriateness of the supply, but also, we are losing in monetary terms approximately \$25 million per year because of that leakage.

The task for the Government is a big one and it presents significant challenges for us. I know that the honourable Minister responsible, we have been having a lot of discussions with the Water Authority of Fiji, with the people who are in charge and we understand the difficulties that people have gone through; not only recently but in the past as well because some of these issues were not addressed for a very long time.

We understand the importance of infrastructure, if there is a drag on the maintenance of infrastructure, it is a drag on the economy, it is a drag on all the sectors of the economy and the efficiency in those sectors. So neglected infrastructure is a serious problem, we are not just talking about water. If you look at our health facilities around the country, government properties, government quarters and we have been in Government for only three months. I can understand why there is so much sensitivity on the other side when we talk about what the problem is because they cannot take the fact that we are highlighting the problems that we have to deal with. We cannot solve all these problems in three months.

I know there are people even outside of this Parliament who think that we can solve all the problems that we have landed on in three months. I would urge the honourable Members on the other side to please have some tenacity to bear the bad news that we are giving to them; to the people of this country under what happened when they were in Government.

For eight years, I sat on the other side and every time there was a big problem, we heard about the past governments, we heard all kinds of examples thrown at us about what the previous governments did not do and sometimes they were talking about what the governments did in 1970s and 1980s. We accepted that, we said that not every government...

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, you didn't.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... gets everything right in their tenure; we acknowledge that. But they also need to acknowledge themselves that they did not do everything right. For many years, I have heard this bragging from honourable Members from the other side when they were this side about what the Government did. I would urge them to show some restraint and understand that we

have just been in Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we talk about maintenance, one of the things that we have already been discussing and the honourable Members have been invited to the National Economic Summit and I hope that all of them will turn up, we can have some good discussions in some of the thematic areas, specific sectors and I will give a Ministerial Statement on the Summit on Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2023 to provide more details.

The Ministry of Finance and I want to let the people of this country know and especially those people in the Suva-Nausori areas who have suffered water cuts, I know as I have been receiving all kinds of calls, but people understand on the contrary that this is a problem that we cannot just solve in three months.

I can assure the people, we are already discussing about maintenance plan, and we want to ensure that these objectives, with respect to maintenance of our infrastructure because you can build infrastructure, and if you do not maintain it on a regular basis, you will see the effect of that in a very short period of time. What we want to do, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that in the next few years, in the next few budgets, we have a very determined, specific agenda to ensure that we provide a maintenance budget or plan so that all the Ministers in respective ministries take the responsibility and ensure that that is done.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, that has been made by some of honourable Members on the other side is important. Sustainability and conservation, these are issues that are important, and people need to understand. I think honourable Sharma made a good point apart from the little jabs that he was throwing but he made a very good point with respect to sustainability of water use and conservation and I think it is a good point.

We also need to look at whether the tariff rate, what is causing that – whether there has been an improvement or not and I am sure the Water Authority of Fiji would be looking at the key drivers for high usage, whether there are enough incentives for water conservation and management by households and individuals. These are important issues in terms of the overall sustainability of water use.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, what I want to say is, sort of going back to where I started. We note that the Water Authority of Fiji is working closely with the Office of the Auditor-General on finalising the backlog of Audit Reports for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 reports. These respective updates are tabulated or planned as follows:

- (1) The draft financial for 2020-2021 is now with the Office of the Auditor-General awaiting the Auditor-General to provide the timelines for field audit.
- (2) The 2021-2022 financial year, the draft financial has been submitted, I am told on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 the draft will be submitted to the Office of the Auditor-General before the end of April or before that.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, that we will be able to catchup on the timeliness and more updated financial annual reports so that when we are debating some of those issues, it is current and makes sense to talk about it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor to the Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for his reply, I must commend the way the debate has gone on especially on the Government side. You have raised a point of lateness, now the honourable Deputy Prime and Minister of Finance is saying they can nip it at the bud by quickly ensuring that all annual reports are

are submitted on time.

That affects the role of the Speaker as well, various Chairmen of Standing Committees wanting more time. It is already a delayed report but they still want more time and we have to put up with that and that very much chews into the budget of the Legislature. So with the reply provided by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, we are grateful that something would be looked into as observed by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contribution to the Report. The Standing Committee on Natural Resources will take all your contributions into consideration.

Once again, I thank the previous Committee for its effort in tabling this Report to Parliament.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF LANDS AND MINERAL RESOURCES 2014 AND 2015 CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Consolidated Annual Reports for the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources 2014 and 2015 which was tabled on 31st August, 2022.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion in regards to the Committee Review Report on 2014-2015 Annual review of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources which was tabled in Parliament by the former Chairperson of the Committee on Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2022.

The Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources administrates all State lands and regulates all mineral resources in Fiji with the aim to ensure that all State lands, minerals and groundwater sector is sustainable. The Ministry through its two Departments, namely the Lands Department and Mineral Resources Department ensures that these activities are carried out in an effective and efficient manner. The two Departments are supported by the Corporate Service Division and Policy and Research Unit (Policy and Reporting) guided by legislations and regulations.

Firstly, the Committee commends the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources for the significant achievements highlighted in the 2014 and 2015 period, despite the challenges faced. The Committee also commends the effort of the Ministry during its deliberation phase for the development and update of the National Land Use Master Plan (NLUMP) which is now available for use.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in its review, the Committee noted that the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources continue to improve its service delivery, purpose and performance through planned and

improved teamwork, networking and continuous dialogue with its stakeholders. In addition, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources has continued to deliver its services through effective and efficient execution of programmes which are aligned to the National Development Plan.

The Committee noted that the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources continued to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff, particularly, in the technical work areas in par with the other competing agencies.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the review exercise was made possible through verifications with the Permanent Secretary and the senior staff of the Ministry.

The Committee, following its scrutiny of the Annual Reports, made the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1**

Timely submission of the Ministry's annual reports to Parliament, within five (5) months after the closing of accounts for the preceding financial year.

**Recommendation 2**

Facilitation of the early enactment of the Mineral Exploitation and Exploration Bill (MEEB).

**Recommendation 3**

The National Land Use Plan is currently demand-based however the Committee recommends a more proactive approach to the Provincial, *Tikina*, Village, *Yavusa*, *Mataqali* and Farm based.

**Recommendation 4**

The survey of land boundaries is to be accelerated as payment of stumpage is payable on trees harvested on each landowning unit.

**Recommendation 5**

Officers recommended for further studies and supported for scholarship application.

Overall, the Committee was satisfied with the performance of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources for the period 2014 and 2015.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor, since it is now open for debate, there are six speakers who are wishing to participate in throwing their views on the motion and will be led off by honourable Usamate when we resume.

At this point, I would like to adjourn Parliament, and before we do adjourn for afternoon tea, as a matter of housekeeping, I, therefore, for the purpose of complying with Standing Orders and 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) is 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 noted from the Order Paper, we still have three reports to debate, as well as our question time. We, as the Government side actually have reduced our number of speakers on our motions hoping that the Opposition would do likewise, but they are very keen to speak, and we are very happy to hear them. So, we would love to accommodate that and have Parliament sit beyond 4.30 p.m. so that we can listen to the Opposition as they present to us. So, we ask Parliament to support this motion to extend beyond 4.30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply, if there is any.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- At this juncture, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for afternoon tea, and when we resume, we will continue.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.58 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.36 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have seven speakers now and the order is as follows:

- (1) Honourable J. Usamate;
- (2) Honourable V. Lal;
- (3) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (4) Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources;
- (5) Honourable M.D. Bulitavu;
- (6) Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.
- (7) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

### **REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF LANDS AND MINERAL RESOURCES 2014 AND 2015 CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to talk on this Report. First of all, I would like to congratulate and thank the Committee for its work, the Committee that did it and the Committee that presented the Report.

Hopefully, I will try and limit myself to may be seven minutes. I will just very briefly dwell on the recommendations. I agree entirely with the recommendations from the Committee, and I think this has been expressed also in Parliament about the fact that we are looking at Reports that go back to 2014 and 2015.

I notice that for this particular Ministry, the 2018-2019 Report is now on their website. However, just looking at some of the issues to do with Annual Reports that lead to their delay, very briefly from the experience that I have had, a number of things lead to this. I think in the different Ministries that people have headed, that is something that we try to address.

The first is knowledge management – knowledge that sits tacitly in someone’s head, and when that person leaves, that information is gone. So, it is just knowledge management - converting tacit knowledge to make it explicit, made available for whoever comes into an organisation. That is always a problem.

I think the other one has been, in a lot of Ministries, the report is ready but they are waiting for the audited financial statements, so those two things. Sometimes, there will be reports ready for two-three years, while you wait for the audits to be done.

For audits, well, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister can tell you the reasons why audits are delayed, all sorts of different reasons. Sometimes, the workload in the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) or sometimes the whole host of other things. The reports can only come together when both of these things are ready.

I think for some of the things that we need to do, all Ministers when we go to a Ministry, we always put this as a KPI - get the annual reports out. So, listening earlier today, that the WAF Reports for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 are ready, I really appreciate that because it is something that we have been pushing very hard, but that is one of the reasons.

We look forward to getting from the honourable Minister on the status or update on the other Annual Reports and also the audited financial statements from 2019, 2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

We look forward to getting from the honourable Minister on the status or update on the other Annual Reports and also the audited financial statements from 2019, 2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. That is probably a big ask for the time being.

The second one is the Mining Act which is the second recommendation. This is something that has been making the rounds for a long time in the Ministry, in the sector, and I am glad to see that it is getting almost to the end now. We thank IGF that has given us free expertise working together with the Mineral Resources Department (MRD) and also the local consultant, a former staff of MRD who has been involved in this work, Venasio Nasara. So, I am very glad to see that the work on the Mining Act is almost complete and we look forward to it being completed so that the big changes can take place. I think there have been 11 or 12 drafts of this legislation, so we are finally glad to see that we are moving to a stage when it will be completed, and I am sure the whole sector is looking to that.

I am glad to see the recommendation on the National Land Use Plan. I understand the ITLTB has also developed one on its own. I am not too sure how these two will be integrated but it is important for us to manage whatever land that we have and use it in the best possible manner.

The fourth recommendation - survey of land boundaries. Reading this recommendation, I think it seems to relate much more to the mahogany forests. This is a big challenge. Mahogany forests are huge, sometimes within a mahogany forest, the boundaries of what belongs to the *mataqali* is not very clear. So, for a long time now, the Ministry of Lands has been sending people in very difficult terrain. There are still some other mahogany forests that need to be looked at, but we look forward to this being undertaken so that the landowners can get a fair return on the mahogany that is on their land, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The last one - officers recommended for further studies and supported for scholarship application. Earlier on, this past week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have talked about this Ministry, and it has been one in which may be 70 to 75 percent of the Senior Management are all female, from the Director downwards. I think that is a good reflection of the emphasis on capacity building, they have been able to get scholarships and push people through the system so that they are very well-educated.

I think this is one particular Ministry you can see this and my recommendation to the Government is to make sure that we keep that. We find a way so that our good talent can go and get their masters and post-graduate degrees, the PS in this Ministry is a Post-Graduate also, she is a Doctor - Dr. Rajjeli Taga. There are other PhDs about to come out, so this is very good. We need to make sure that in Government Ministries we maintain it so that they can continue to provide good results for the people at large. So, I will keep it there, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to share some experience. First of all, we get to know the people that we are working together really well when. I used to be a Member of the Public Accounts Committee before, and honourable Maharaj was our Chairperson. We used to have our meetings at the OAG Conference Room. That was how we began to build a good relationship with the Auditor-General and his staff.

There is so many finger-pointing going on, not signing of the report when they leave the complex, et cetera, but that is all just finger-pointing. But the best solution is like what honourable Maharaj did, he took the meeting to them. He took our PAC meetings and hold them in the OAG Conference Room. That was a tremendous leap forward in us knowing, understanding and them understanding us as well. So, honourable Usamate has raised a very valid point there. There are other factors and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications knows it very well.



When the report is finished by the Ministry, the Auditor-General is still waiting for it to be passed from him and that takes another while before the final report comes into Parliament and when it comes to Parliament, you have this 60-day limitation there. Perhaps, we need to relook at that. Can we shorten the 60-day period in our review of our Standing Orders? I am just throwing this in and it is up to you, honourable Members, because that has been highlighted by the Government that something is terribly wrong here - the delays of the Reports.

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity and I also thank the previous Committee and the current Committee for coming up with the Report. I am not going to talk on the recommendations of the Report as it has already been read out by the Mover of the motion and also the findings of the Committee. I will be very short, Sir.

The Committee viewed that the Ministry's overall performance in 2014 and 2015 was satisfactory, even with the limited resources in place. It was noted that during those operational years, the Ministry met with challenges which enabled the Ministry to promote and improve their service delivery.

The Committee noted the dedication by all staff of the Ministry in both years - 2014 and 2015, that had enabled the Ministry to implement its programmes has budgeted for and more importantly, in achieving its targets.

The Report highlighted issues of over-exploitation, unregulated illegal extraction, underestimation of the industry's output and environmental degradation, resulting from poorly regulated development mineral industry.

The Report recommends various measures to address these issues, including the:

- transformation of manual record-keeping to an electronic centralised database system;
- a review of current fees levied by Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources;
- the use of digital technologies for monitoring purposes;
- conducting regular trainings and workshops on financial literacy;
- resource management for resource owners; and
- carrying out awareness programmes on the impact of river gravel and sand extractions to the environment.

The mineral industry plays a major role in Fiji's domestic development, particularly in infrastructure, construction, agriculture and disaster reconstruction, as well as supporting a large number of Fijian small and medium-sized domestic enterprises.

Overall, the Report highlights the importance of effective regulation and sustainable management of the extractive industry sector to secure governance and sustainable development in Fiji. With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief, considering that honourable Usamate has actually covered most of the issues. But very pertinent recommendations have come out of this Report, and I see it is not very contentious.

But just to add on to that, Sir, one of the things that was glaringly obvious with respect to the Ministry of Lands is that some of the other Departments around Government never actually realised the kind of resources that are available within the Ministry of Lands, especially at the Mineral Resources Division.

I remember an episode where the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) was actually hunting down some people who were needed in respect to get some geotechnical work done and they would have ended up spending millions to actually hire someone to do it with respect to the bridge. I offered a simple solution to them and say, “Why are you not using one Government Department paying another Government Department to use MRD to get the actual information?” So, it is just stuff like that - it requires a lot of coordination, and it actually helps and I think that everyone needs to come to a realisation.

One of the other problem, Sir, there is a wealth of expertise and young expertise and knowledge that actually exists within the MRD and the Ministry of Lands that we do not make use of. One of the biggest obstacles to getting a lot done at the Ministry of Lands also was the process of digitisation that actually needed to be completed. I think that is a very helpful thing for all of us at the end of the day. I am not sure if there has been PBR to actually do that at the moment, but it would be something that should be a part of the whole process to ensure that we have a very efficient Ministry of Lands which I think it has, but it still requires a lot of work. Those are my submissions, Sir, and I support the motion.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, first, I take the opportunity to thank the Standing Committee on Natural Resources that had dealt with this Report and also the Standing Committee that have now able to table this Report here this afternoon. The work that they have done in the financial year of 2014-2015.

Again, there had been a number of Ministers who have occupied the position, two of them are here, two are not but also the hard work of the previous Permanent Secretaries - Mr. Boseiwaqa and Mr. Malakai Finau; the hardworking and dedicated Senior Management Team of the Ministry, as well as all personnel who had worked hard to put in together the Annual Report that we are now discussing in this Parliament today.

Mr. Speaker, it has come to my attention that in the period of review - 2014-2015, even though there had been limited resources provided by the Ministry for the various work that it is required to do statutorily, they had performed very satisfactorily. So, that is something that the Report had picked up.

I also want to reiterate that the year of the review presented its own sets of challenges, but the Ministry was still able to provide the service delivery that the public expected of them, which is something that we, of course, in 2023 still want to maintain and to improve on in the next few months.

There were a number of highlights, Mr. Speaker, that were highlighted in the period of review, part of which is the review of the Organisation Structure which, of course, had been ongoing since 2014-2015 and remains ongoing today.

However, out of the Report, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources have made five general observations and I want to just run through them quickly, Mr. Speaker.

### **Recommendation 1**

Timely submission of the Ministry’s Annual Report to Parliament should be done within five months after the closing of accounts for the preceding year.

Since 2014-2015 and I suppose even upto now, that remains a challenge. When the books are closed how fast we get to reconcile books and how fast really the Office of the Auditor -General comes to the Office to do their part so that in a timely fashion, Parliament could be able to discuss them and dispose of them in a timely manner.

In the past three years, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has been working towards tabling all of its Annual Reports that have been pending - 2020-2021, 2021-2022 Reports and those are earmarked to be presented in this Chamber in this financial year;

### **Recommendation 2**

Facilitation of the early enactment of the Mineral Exploitation and Exploration Bill.

The review of the Mineral Exploration and Exploitation Bill and the Minerals Policy of Fiji commenced, Mr. Speaker, after a Cabinet decision was made on it in December 2020. Following that, an agreement was put in place between the Inter-Governmental Forum (IGF) on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development of Canada and the Government of Fiji by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources in 2021.

The IGF, Mr. Speaker, is a leading global Inter-Governmental Forum on Mining and Sustainable Development with its objective being to improve, sustain and contribute to the mining, minerals and metal sector to sustain development and, of course, help in poverty reduction.

Mr. Speaker, the assessment exercise not only involves research and review of relevant documents and records on National Mining Laws, Policies, Regulations and Administrative Framework, but also is extensive on person to person consultation with key stakeholders from Government, the private sector and also the civil society, as well as those who are involved in the mining sector. And as highlighted by honourable Usamate, now there is a former staff of the Ministry who is appointed by the IGF to be the local consultant to conduct work on Phase 1. The Mining Legislation of 1965 really needs some review and that is work in progress at the moment.

Phase 1, Mr. Speaker, has already been completed. The report for Phase 1 has been compiled and has been submitted to Cabinet for their consideration and approval. We are now presently awaiting the commencement of Phase 2.

### **Recommendation 3**

On the National Land Use Plan which is currently demand base, the Committee recommends a more proactive approach, that is, provincial, *tikina*, village, *yavusa*, *mataqali* and also emphasis on farm base.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current Land Use Master Plan project has been revamped with a focus on the greater Western Division. The other two Divisions - Northern and the Central/Eastern will be completed by 2024-2025 financial year in the North and 2023-2024.

Upon completion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the final product will be a State Land Use Master Plan that will guide the Management in making leasing decision and to coordinate a more robust approach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the State Land Use Master Plan will complement the similar work that has been carried out by iTLTB in their own Master Plan. It will cover development plans for *mataqali*, village and at *tikina* levels with the completion of the two master plans by the two agencies - State land, as well as iTLTB, combine end product. Hopefully, it will give us a National Land Use Master Plan to be used by relevant authorities in planning ahead for future developments and proposals.

### **Recommendation 4**

The survey of land boundaries needs to be accelerated as payment for stumpage is payable on trees harvested on each landowning unit.

Mr. Speaker, the previous two speakers have spoken about how tough it is for landowners to have their mahogany plantations surveyed. They have to deal with tough terrains and tough weather conditions and just recently, Mr. Speaker, for Parliament's information, in the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources *Facebook* page, there is a video that we have deliberately uploaded so that people will get to understand and know how the surveyors do their work, where they leave their homes and for months they do not return. Some would camp out in the forest for many days and for weeks, just so they can do the work that is required of them so that landowners who rely on the stumpage of the trees would be able to get what is rightfully theirs.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry, through the Survey Division and, again, in pursuit of a Cabinet Decision that was made in 2008, with an endorsement extension in 2021 and in agreement with the Fiji Hardwood Corporation, they continue to prioritise the survey of these mahogany lots.

For instance, in Galoa, a total of 12 lots with a total area of 7,382.3 hectares has already been surveyed and that has been completed. The Naboutini Mahogany comprises of nine lots with a total area of 4,921 hectares which have been surveyed and completed. The Nukurua Forest Mahogany, of course, is one of the large ones which consists of 28 lots with a total area of 5,160 hectares, 2,949 hectares (about half of that) is still yet to be surveyed. That brings a balance of 2,660 hectares to be done in the future. For Sawakasa, the mahogany encompasses 16 lots with a total area of 4,128 hectares, 1,881 hectares has been surveyed and a balance of 2,746 remains to be surveyed. The surveyors are on the ground doing what needs to be done so that we can cover the balance and get Fiji Mahogany to do what needs to be done to the landowners.

#### **Recommendation 5**

Officers recommended for further studies and support for scholarship application.

The present Director of Mineral Resources is studying in Japan and, of course, the honourable gentleman Usamate had spoken about, knowledge retention. That continues to be the challenge that we have at the Ministry because the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, being a former Minister for Lands in earlier years is a very technical Ministry. There are surveyors, geospatial specialists - all of these requires very specific and fine training. So, when we lose them, their knowledge goes away from the Ministry, and it is hard to replace them. Even up until today, we continue to lose very technical officers from the Mineral Resources Department as well as the Ministry of Lands. It is something that perhaps, we could all contribute to in how civil servants are able to retain people so that they can continue to provide the service to the public.

Mr. Speaker, the last recommendation of course is on Gender Equality Analysis. For some reason, there was no information on gender provided in the Annual Report, except for a Gender Policy achieved by the Ministry during the period under review. However, we all know, and we have spoken about the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources when it was tabled here last week and how the Ministry now have women in its top management level.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the two gentlemen who are seated here and their predecessors for encouraging women in their role in the Ministry. But this Government, we have been able to give them permanency of jobs and that is something that they are very happy about.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I commend the Report to Parliament and I, again, thank the Standing Committee that had dealt with this, and the Standing Committee that have now tabled its Report to Parliament today.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my contribution to the motion that is before Parliament and, that is, to note the recommendations of the Committee on the 2014-2015 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Report.

I will just touch on Recommendation 3 and, that is, the development of the National Land Use Plan that the honourable Minister has alluded to and the final product that will come out of that is the Vanua GIS. I know that you will understand that, Sir, when you were former Manager of iTLTB.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Vanua GIS is very important as all landowners have to have a fair understanding of our geospatial sets or what are the features there on our land, especially the Land Use Plan and also working with iTLTB on how landowners can assign various resources that are available on their land, whether it is river resources, rock for quarries, land that will be suitable for subdivision, whether any other economic interests on their land, there needs to be proper valuation. So, this Vanua GIS also connects them to investors who might be interested in their land. They are able to see those features that will be available in the system. That will come out of the Land Use Plan.

I also urge the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources to work closely with iTLTB because they have a more comprehensive National Land Use Framework where all the iTaukei consultation or *veivakararamataki* which is called *Koro ni Yau* - a program which takes them to the landowners to do awareness and gives them a fair idea of their maps and what is available on their land and what kind of development they can pursue on that land. Not only that, but other things also that could be used as village reserve and other subsistence farming. Those are some of the things that landowners need to be educated and understand proper participation in all these awareness programmes that will be facilitated by the Ministry and also other stakeholders out there including the Ministry of Forestry and Fisheries.

The other thing that I would like to highlight is the borehole project. I think in the last motion we were talking about the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report, but the Ministry of Lands also specialises on water resources. How we can we develop all those communities during a drought? I think there are ongoing programmes identifying and also other research done to borehole projects in various areas which Government in the past has directed funds to help our communities who do face water problems.

The other thing that I would like to highlight is on the mining industry and more consultation with the landowners especially mining companies on their operations, whether it is on exploration, whether it is moving towards exploitation, their rights and also the EIA plus, other things that the landowners need to be aware of in moving forward.

One of the biggest achievements of the FijiFirst government, if you see the mining industry in Section 30 of the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji which talks about a fair share of royalty, it was part of the 1997 Constitution under the SVT Government but it was not implemented until the FijiFirst Government came in under the 2013 Constitution which has allowed a fair share of royalty for landowners whether it is a State land, a freehold land or *iTaukei* land.

Sir, 80 percent of that royalty goes to landowners. There are certain projects that were pioneered like the one in Nawailevu plus another one in Vatukoula, those have received and benefited from mineral royalties and those royalties have really helped the communities in moving into investment, and part of that fund too is for their future generation that is invested by the future generation fund under the Land Bank of the Ministry of Lands.

I think last week we were talking about the Land Bank; we have heard from the honourable Minister of Lands that they will go through a consultation on whether they will revert back to iTLTB. However, something about Land Bank, Sir, under the Land Use Division of the Ministry of Lands, I think nothing is paid, landowners just deposit their land there and all the costs to develop that land is forked by the Ministry. This is something that has really helped landowners in the past in developing their land for investment and also to allow those who want to come and lease their land to see that they have a system in place, that also assist the landowners in terms of land rentals. The Ministry of Lands does not charge any poundage like iTLTB plus all other things that go directly to the landowners to develop. There are examples of achievements for landowners in Savusavu in the Northern Division and all other areas that are part of this Land Bank.

Those are few things, Sir, that I would like to share as part of achievements but there are other challenges that the Ministry has taken on board. Just before I conclude, Sir, we have been talking about the delay of our Annual Reports. One of the responses by the Ministry in this particular Annual Report 2014 and 2015 as the reason why the Ministry of Lands Annual Reports was delayed was because there was reorganisation and restructure within the Ministry. But if we are going to push Annual Reports to be timely, I think the onus is on the Government. If the Government will bring in more changes, we should expect more delays because once you bring in new changes, new policies, then there is a new system in place coming in again. For the system that is now familiar with the civil servant, they are familiar with policies. Once the new Government comes in with new changes, we should expect the delay of these Annual Reports and other things that we will see as we move forward.

However, for Annual Reports, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce was talking about the delay in outdated reports. All those reports are with Parliament, Parliament decides when it comes for debate. The reports are there with the Committee, more recent years but if this is 2023 and we are debating a report from 2014 and 2015, we will expect the People's Coalition Government's Annual Report to come in 2026 if we are not timely.

If you see the backlog that is there, that is a challenge and I hope that the honourable Minister for Finance will look into that and the timeliness of annual reports coming into Parliament. That is practical when you see those reports that are coming into Parliament and when we expect the People's Coalition Government, the various ministries that they run now to come into Parliament. I think they probably will not be happy to be in government and debating for Annual Reports that were done by FijiFirst government because there are plenty of achievements in those Annual Reports. Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you for your indulgence and I commend the Report that is before Parliament.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to support the comments of the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources and I would like to make a few additional comments.

I commend the work that the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, even though there are huge challenges faced by the Ministry in terms of resources but what we are hearing today is basically something new, innovative and I also would like to acknowledge the contribution of the former Ministers on the other side.

The Office of the Solicitor-General has been actively involved in not only providing timely legal advice to the Ministry but also assist with the Ministry in legal vetting of the Cabinet papers, policies, frameworks and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the matter's filed against the Ministry in court, a total number of active cases filed in 2014 were 33 matters. There is another issue I wish to highlight. This is in regard to amendments to the State Lands Act. In 2021, section 13 of the Act was amended by the State Land

(Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 or known as Bill No. 16 of 2021 to remove the requirement of obtaining written consent from the Director of Lands for any mortgage, charge, pledge, caveats on protected leases or any such lease to be dealt with by any court of law or under the process of any court of law.

Consent is still required for dealings such as transfers, sales, sub-leases, rezoning, et cetera. The previous government had legislated this amendment by giving reasons that the amendment would ensure faster service delivery to leases, and third parties will no longer need to obtain the consent of the Director of Lands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure you are quite familiar with the process as a owner of the land, it is only right that the Director of Lands would like to know what has happened to that lease before its mortgaged. Unfortunately, and hopefully in the future we will get some detailed report if the amendments have actually achieved the result, the intended purpose. Sir, I support the motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try and be very brief. I know the honourable Members who have spoken before me have covered most of the issues and in particular the honourable Minister for Lands, I think they will put the recommendations in details so I am not going to talk about those.

Mr. Speaker, honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce, honourable Deputy Minister and Minister for Tourism and I have been talking about streamlining business processes, streamlining investment proposals, approvals and I think the relationship between the Ministry of Lands, the iTaukei Land Trust Board and Town and Country Planning is very, very important from a development point of view and from an approval point of view. I kind of note with satisfaction that there was a committee (with the former Ministry of Economy) now the Ministry of Finance, iTaukei Land Trust Board, Ministry of Lands and Department of Town and Country Planning.

From the report I have got, they were able to sort out 900 scheme plan applications. Now that is very satisfying because a lot these scheme plans, we have heard stories in the past, get stuck. I would say that the honourable Minister for Lands will continue with that Committee and make sure that these approvals are efficient and done in a timely manner.

The other innovations that I saw, I want to acknowledge the Vanua View Online free access. I think that is a good innovation and also the fair share of Mineral Royalties Bill, which was passed in May 2018, where the landowners are entitled to 80 percent of royalty payments and the Government takes about 20 percent for administration cost. And beneficiaries are the landowning units, as well as owners of freehold land if minerals are extracted from the freehold land. The Ministry received over the last six years on average about \$25 million a year, a total of about \$155 million in budget. I note that they also have a significant arrears as of today of \$23.8 million is owed as rental arrears to the State. So, I am sure the honourable Minister for Lands is looking at that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I finish off, I am always amused by honourable Bulitavu's contribution. I actually enjoy his contribution because some of the things that he is now saying, were quite the opposite of what he was saying when he was with us. And maybe, he is already thinking of coming this side.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- And we will welcome him back.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments, but I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contributions. We will take your contribution into consideration. I appreciate the work done by the previous Committee in reviewing this said report and tabled in Parliament.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI REVENUE AND CUSTOMS SERVICE 2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

That Parliament debates the review Report of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2017 to 2018 Annual Report.

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

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of this august Parliament, I rise to speak on the review Report of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2017 to 2018 Annual Report.

The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its review Report of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2017 to 2018 Annual Report during the 2022 Parliament sitting by the former Chairperson, honourable Vijay Nath. During the period under review, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) collected \$2.83 billion in net tax revenue, recording a growth of \$252.8 million, which was about 9.8 percent over the fiscal year of 2016 to 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FRCS has introduced a Standard Interpretation Guideline 6 during the 2017-2018 period, which is an extremely useful instrument that enables taxpayers to understand the technical interpretations made by FRCS. These guidelines cover all the complex issues, which the taxpayers would be able to access and understand, especially regarding specific tax policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee had commended FRCS for transitioning towards the use of digital technology through the use of HR Information System, including online Performance Management System within the organisation. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the former Committee Members, honourable Vijay Nath, Mrs. Veena Bhatnagar, Mr. Sachida Nand, Mr. Inosi Kuridrani and honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau who were part of the team that produced this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor, I would like to inform honourable Members that we have about five speakers sent by the Whip of the Opposition and the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. Batting order is as follows:

(1) Honourable P.D. Kumar;



- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (3) Honourable V. Nath;
- (4) Honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport; and
- (5) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Economic Affairs Committee for analysing the Annual Report and coming up with their findings and recommendations. There is no denying that FRCS has a very critical role to play in funding the national budget. The FRCS is tasked to collect maximum revenue every year based on the targets set by the Board.

With this revenue, the Government provides essential services such as education, health, better infrastructure, pension for elderly, social welfare payments and many other services to our people. If the FRCS fails to collect revenue, then the Government budget is affected, which in turn affects socio-economic development, including the aspiration of all Fijians for a better life.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is, therefore, very important that meritocracy is the basis for the appointment of Board members and staff of the FRCS. If Board members or staff members are not recruited based on merit, the Government will suffer with revenue collection, and without revenue, promises made by the Government cannot be delivered.

The last thing we do not want to hear from our honourable Deputy Prime Minister is there is no money or where is the money. To answer those two questions, he needs to improve the functioning of FRCS through the Board members. Where is the money, there is no money has become his famous rhetoric and excuse as well. So, I would like to urge the honourable Minister of Finance that he should whinging and just get the job done.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is 100 days and the Coalition Government failed to deliver its promises. No one asked them to come up with 100 days of deliverables. They made the commitment and they announced that they will deliver in the first 100 days. We have heard in the previous debate, they are saying, “it is only three months, it is only three months.” Well, you came up with your list of things that you will deliver in three months, not one year or two years, you said exactly 100 days so the people of this country, all Fijians are looking forward to the promises that you made.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Exactly!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the board members of FRCS who served during the period under review. They achieved 9.8 percent growth in revenue collection. We have heard the total collection was \$2.83 billion. That is an increase of about \$252.8 million. Such result is only possible when you appoint the right people for the job.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is greatly appreciated that the board members of FRCS then, Mr. Ajith Kodagoda, Ms. Makereta Konrote and late Mr. Faiz Khan, worked tirelessly without even taking a dollar as a board fee. The only board member who received the board fee was the late Jone Vatukela. None of the board members came out publicly to say they were working for free. That showed their humbleness and commitment to serving the nation with no personal gain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there have been continuous investment made by FRCS and under the leadership of this board, FRCS embarked on a transformational journey. The tax collection system was modernised, even they started working on the legislation to modernise the legislation as well. Customer-centric approaches were adopted and that is why there was a name change from Authority to Service. They also adopted digital technologies and these digital technologies were introduced for example, Electronic Fiscal Devices (EFD) to monitor VAT, STT and ECAL collections in that particular year but we all know that STT and ECAL were scrapped later on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all have heard from the honourable Minister of Finance, and I think only last week he mentioned that he intends to remove VAT Monitoring System (VMS). That, in my view is not a good idea but of course the government of the day can make that decision.

(Honourable Prof. B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So if he intends to suspend the third phase, I support him for that. It does make sense because the third phase was for the small businesses and such cautionary approach is far better, so it is a good move, honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the CEO of FIRCS at that time also talked about VMS and he actually appreciated the tax collection they were making from phase one and phase two which were mainly for the bigger companies like supermarkets, pharmacies et cetera. I can share a story with you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I was working for Consumer Council of Fiji, we used to receive calls from workers who were working for supermarkets. They will exactly say which cash register was not connected to FRCS and which ones were connected. So that meant that the company or the supermarket could collect black money and that was the case previously when VMS was not introduced.

We have also heard and read that in 2007, the World Bank conducted a study and they found that one-third of our economy was in black and losing such an amount of money is a concern for any government because if that money is collected, the government can deliver more services. So, it is again very important that we continue to improve FRCS and ensure that we collect maximum revenue out of that organisation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate again FRCS for their forward-looking initiatives in that year which included research and development work on the introduction of new tax information system and the taxpayer online services. Such transformation is needed in the digital world that we live in. We cannot be stuck in the past, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the global world changes, the organisation must move on and adapt to that change.

The FRCS underwent innovation and technology driven transformation and when an organisation undergoes major transformation, it is expected that the organisation's structure must reorient to respond to such changes. You cannot have a transformation on one hand and continue to keep the same set of workers, either you provide that training, or you have to let go some people. That is how corporates work if they want profits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen, and it has become a common practice that politicians start interfering with a statutory body. Who knows better how the organisation should be run and when it comes to letting go of staff then we see politicians jumping in and start giving advice to those organisations or actually forcing them to take those workers back. I think there is a separate process, and the process is the system that we have created, if there are worker grievances, it is through that process that people should go through.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I would like to acknowledge the board, the CEO, Mr Visvanath Das and his team for achieving such a good result during the period under review. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, unlike the other side of Parliament, I will try and keep my comments brief so that we can proceed with business as there is a lot to cover. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly congratulations to the Committee for coming up with a Report, the Economic Affairs Standing Committee and for picking on some issues that I thought I would pick on. The honourable Premila Kumar provided some segue for me in terms of asking the honourable Minister of Finance on how are we going to find the money.

Let me assure you, Sir, I was not here when the honourable Minister of Finance made his very excellent Ministerial Statement on the State of Government Wastage I guess in the country or Economic Management. But just to assure the Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji that even though when you read the honourable Deputy Prime Minister's statement, there is a daunting task ahead of this country in terms of that amount of capital expenditure that we need to spend.

I have got a slightly different take, Mr. Speaker, Sir. From what I have seen in the last three months, there is tremendous opportunity for our country and that therein lies the secret to how we are going to succeed or fall in the next four years.

I have just returned from a Trade Mission in New Zealand and if New Zealand is an indication of what we are going to see across the rest of our trading partners, there are some very good opportunities in front of us.

So, in short answer to honourable Premila Kumar's concerns, rest assured, and certainly as the Minister for Trade is responsible for investment and plays a key role in the stimulation of the economy and the driving of economic growth in the country with the assistance of the honourable Minister of Finance, we are quite optimistic in terms of where we should head.

You can quote me on this in a couple of years but like I said, I was not joking, Sir, when I said in my Maiden Speech here that we really should be looking at doubling, at least, 50 percent growth in the economy in the next 10 years. So, that means an average growth of about five percent each year for the next five years because that is the way we will resolve the tremendous capital expenditure.

Yes, the previous Government decided to lend and borrow a lot, not understanding that with dislocations like COVID-19, things can get, as they say in some worlds, pear-shaped.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, certainly I can speak on behalf of my Ministry and our colleagues on this side of Parliament, including the honourable Minister for Tourism, we do see a lot of upside in the economy, Sir. We hope to activate what needs to be activated and will ensure that if we are going forward, that we keep the economy on an even keel.

I have been asked by the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, and Transport to contribute on the IT side of things which I thought I will share some thoughts in this Parliament because it is part of my training, I guess.

One of the challenges that we always face in IT is we try and replicate systems that are big country systems. So, we adopt sometimes technology that is big country technology as opposed to looking at things like off-the shelf software, sometimes looking at closer partners that may have the software that we can use and when we try and develop our own, that is when we faced a lot of risks.

I have been a user of the current tax systems, it is not complete which is sad, which means that we have spent a lot of good taxpayer money but have not achieved the outcomes that we are supposed to achieve from a proper online tax system.

It is another example of wastage. My colleagues in the profession told me that the initial consultation on the system was virtually zero - that the system was adopted and then consultation happened once the selection of the system had started.

Those are some of the things that we will not repeat on this side of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We will ensure that before we deploy systems, that good disciplines and practices are in place.

Under communications, I look after IT, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I can assure this House that we will ensure we do not have a repeat of this kind of debacles going forward because this is what the people of Fiji demand of us, that we are responsible with the money we invest, particularly in IT systems, and it is important that we spend their money responsibly.

So, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute and I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me this opportunity to contribute to the motion moved by the honourable Member. At the outset, I congratulate the current honourable Members on their appointment to the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, as former Chairperson, thank all honourable Members for their contribution in compiling the Report which was a bipartisan Report: the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, and Transport, former Members – Mr. Inosi Kuridrani, Mrs. Veena Bhatnagar and Mr. Sachida Nand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022, the Fiji Revenue & Customs Service (FRCS) Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Mark Dixon, and his Team appeared before the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to discuss the Fiji Revenue & Customs Service 2017-2018 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FRCS is a statutory authority established under the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service Act 1999. It is a major revenue collector for Government, so it is very important that they improve on the outstanding tax so that it brings more revenue for Government.

A number of initiatives were planned by FRCS, but it was slowed down or put on hold due to COVID-19. However, it is understandable that now, FRCS will fight back and continue with its initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted in that year that FRCS collected \$283 billion in net tax revenue, recording a growth \$552.8 million which was about 9.8 percent overall over the fiscal year. Someone asked me how we got that 9.8 percent growth? I will try to explain, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Income tax for 2017-2018 rose to \$749,905,090. That was a 7.5 percent increase. VAT in the same year recorded a 12.3 percent increase. Trade Tax, a 10 percent increase, other taxes and levies increased to 9.3 percent. One can find this in the Verbatim Report, which is in the Parliament website, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, across all those tax types, the collection in 2017 was compared to the previous year increase by 9.8 percent. The Committee commended FRCS for the effort.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the Report, there were six findings and recommendations and I have spoken on the first just now. There were other finding and recommendations which the Committee really appreciated.

In the introduction, the Committee noted that in the same year, FRCS commenced with the modernisation of both, Custom and Tax legislation and the programme will continue which definitely you will find that in the new or other Reports where you will find the best part of it.

The introduction of Authorisation Economic Operator (AEO), the programme was also introduced in the same year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the same year, FRCS introduced a new Tax Information System (TIS) Programme, and I am optimistic that we will definitely be seeing that achievement in the other Reports which will be coming to the Committee, and I fully support the Committee's Report. In fact, I am supporting my own Report and I request the Members to, please, support this Report as well.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service Report which I was a Member of that Committee with my Chairman, that scrutinised the Report. In our committee, we would normally have consensus, but we also agreed that when we come into Parliament, we can also raise issues, which might not be along the lines which we are recommending.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, that is normal.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Anyway, on the new tax information system in the recommendation, that was a concern and I had thought about bringing it up to the Committee to have a special audit on that.

In terms of our Committee, because there are three of them and two of us, we are to reach consensus so we agreed just to bring it with those recommendations. This is a major issue - FRCS's IT system, and we had looked at some of the reports with regards to the amount of funds which was spent on it. For example, by the end of July, it was \$1.1 million but it jumped to \$7.056 million in 2019, so it is huge.

When you look at the figures by 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018 in terms of consultancies, it was \$3.3 million. There were issues not only for the initial contract, but also the implementation and based on what we have discussed with the CEO, when we upgrade an IT system in an organisation, we do business process mapping, so we go step by step and map that out, then get the IT software to match them.

In this case, it does not seem to have been initially done, so as the project progressed, it was amended as it went along, which was why the costs escalated in terms of the consultancies. That is why today, a lot of us experience issues with the IT.

I just read out one of the feedbacks, Sir, and I quote:

“It is high risk to invest in Fiji at this moment given the problems in FRCS. Our new digital tax portal system is a shamble, it cannot operate itself, it cannot reconcile payments with assessments. It cannot distinguish between taxpayers who have a tax file extension numbers and those who do not.

Taxpayers are now receiving demands for tax returns which have already been filed and even worse, the taxpayers are being penalised for late lodgement of returns that have

already been lodged, and late payment in taxes which have already been paid.

Some taxpayers are receiving assessments showing overdue tax owing while their statement of tax account with the FRCS has a credit balance.”

This happened to me. I had a tax clearance but just lately, they advised that I have some tax due but that was cleared about six months back, so it seems that the various databases within are not communicating. I think that is why the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is putting the system on hold, and that is an issue which we would need to overcome.

Again, the original initial assessment, the contracting and the progressive type of business planning processing and payment as it progress is a big issue and it might need a special audit.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, the way you looked at me, I thought you were directing me.

I thank the honourable Members for their contribution, and I agree with the sentiments expressed by everyone which says that FRCS is a very important arm of Government which collects taxes and duties on behalf of the Government. It also provides quality advice on tax and customs matters to all stakeholders, including the Ministry of Finance, facilitates trade, travel and protects our borders.

As the former Chairman highlighted, it is a statutory body governed under the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service Act 1999 and we now have a new Board led by Mr. Malakai Naiyaga; a man of integrity, experienced and I have every confident that he will lead, not only the Board but together with the CEO and staff, a very, very competent organisation for us and an important one for the future.

Mr. Speaker, let me say that FRCS went through some turbulent times in the recent past *ad hoc* changes were done. Within FRCS, with massive staff redundancies which led to critical staff shortages, skill loss and manpower. In fact, Sir, I remember raising this in this Parliament - the morale of the staff had actually plummeted, and we brought this quite actively in Parliament when we were in Opposition.

I was listening very carefully to what honourable Premila Kumar said, Mr. Speaker, and I absolutely agree with her that we need people of integrity and experience to be on the Board and Chair the Board. Honourable Kumar maybe just forgot, and I have just highlighted that in the recent past, there was a lot of *ad hoc* changes, staff redundancies, loss of skills and that was done under a Chairman appointed by the previous Government and that person (I would not be like the previous government naming people here) was sacked by a significant important regional organisation for being unethical. He was appointed the Chair of the FRCS Board, and that was when a lot of these things happened. I agree with her, but they should also reflect on what happened under them. That is a very important point, and they know what happened.

The new Board, Mr. Speaker, is obviously looking into the new organisational structure. They are looking at staffing needs and I can assure them that the additional funding will be provided to fund a fit-for-purpose FRCS that can effectively collect taxes and provide service to the taxpayers and support trade and business generally.

During this process, Mr. Speaker, I know the Board and the CEO are working very closely. To provide for additional recruitment, genuine opportunities are being provided to former staff to return to FRCS and I am also told that the FRCS is shortly about to sign the new collective agreement

with the union after a very, very good consultation with them. So, these are attempts as a new Government who recognises that we need a harmonious industrial relations environment, staff need to be compensated, provided a working environment that is conducive to their productivity.

Mr. Speaker, FRCS right now has a new leadership team, and the new CEO has been investing in that process and trying to create a culture within FRCS to become an employer of choice. I am told that for the first time, a female director of Taxation was appointed. This is very important as we are continuing to invest in people and ensuring that the environment within those organisations are good.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Board has also proved the new Strategic Plan for FRCS that seeks to improve strategic engagement with taxpayers and making it easier for them to comply and harder not to, because that is also very important.

The key focus, Mr. Speaker, moving forward would be to, firstly, become an employer of choice where every staff is valued with clear recognition of a positive workforce and culture linked to strong leadership and technical skills.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, FRCS will maintain its new focus on being a customer-centric organisation because we have talked about this before that people should not fear FRCS. In fact, a good tax collecting agency promotes businesses, works with them, resolves issues in an environment of trust and partnership so that we can build their confidence which, Mr. Speaker, in some sense was lacking in the past.

The honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, and Transport talked about the IT Project, the new tax information system. Mr. Speaker, we recognised that some requirements have changed since the original scoping and FRCS, therefore, is working and has created a new collaborative team with staff from FRCS, representatives from the Fiji Institute of Accountants, industry and business partners to agree to the enhancements required and how we can move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to go into the details of the 2017-2018 Annual Report, but I just wanted to quickly highlight that a total of \$2.83 billion tax revenue was collected by FRCS in the financial year, recording a growth of 9.8 percent for \$2.8 million over the previous financial year.

The revenue, Mr. Speaker, accounted for 87.3 percent of total Government revenue. The total revenue - VAT is leading the revenue collection with a contribution of 27.9 percent, followed by income tax at 26.5 percent. Trade taxes stood at 23.6 percent and other taxes and levies contributing about 22 percent.

Mr. Speaker, it is significant to note, and this is a very important point that we need to make, the Report actually highlights that the total tax revenue collection for the financial year 2017-2018 was below the forecast by 8.6 percent for \$266.8 million and 3.5 percent below the revised forecast. So, one of the reasons for the under collection of revenue by FRCS for the review period would have been due to tax reforms just before the 2018 General Election in mind, I am sure.

So, Mr. Speaker, tax exemptions and incentives are usually provided to encourage investment in particular sectors, products or projects, or to encourage certain types of spending. However, Sir, we all know and honourable Members would know that tax exemptions and incentives can have unintended consequences, it can have adverse impacts, it may not lead to those kind of results as envisaged by those tax incentives and exemptions, if not carefully assessed and given, can erode the tax base and can result in significant revenue losses which often, means that those in the lower income

income bracket would be burdened with more taxes.

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative for the Government to do tax reforms, streamline and re-evaluate some tax exemptions and incentives and encourage self-regulation to improve tax compliance with the Medium-Term Fiscal Strategy that we have already presented to Parliament. I know, Mr. Speaker, some of them asked, where is your plan? They forgot that we have already presented to Parliament our Medium-Term Fiscal Strategy 2024-2026 which talks about spending more efficient, streamlining taxes and working on revenue enhancing measures.

Mr. Speaker, I have already said in other forums that the following will be the guiding policy principles in the medium term:

- (1) We intend to widen the tax base by gradually removing exemptions and other distortions.
- (2) Improve tax compliance and collection of tax areas,
- (3) Make the tax regime and tax administration even simpler to encourage tax compliance.

Mr. Speaker, one of the principles of a good tax system is administrative simplicity. If you do not adhere to that principle of taxation, then you could see a lot of leakages, a lot of distortions and a lot of waste and inefficiencies in the economy.

I also noted, Mr. Speaker, before I conclude, honourable Premila Kumar talked about the former CEO, Mr. Visvanath Das, and thanked him for the performance that he was able to achieve but, obviously, she forgot to tell us, why he was removed. Did he leave on his own? What was it?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- As I have pointed out, it is actually quite reach to hear from honourable Members from the other side about meritocracy, about appointments on Boards and I know the honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about it, that we should appoint good people. We are appointing good people, Mr. Speaker, but their record I am not saying 100 percent but littered with appointments of cronies, people who supported the FijiFirst Party, people who funded them, so that is how they were doing it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all our people, investors, our taxpayers that FRCS is going to become an efficient, customer friendly and an organisation that is going to be a very, very important arm of Government. I know, when I asked, where is the money, honourable Premila Kumar obviously, did not understand what I was saying when I was talking about wastage, when I was talking about deteriorating infrastructure, when I was talking about extravagance in spending and wastage, that is the question, where is the money? Why cannot people see the results of that - in the hospital, on the roads, in the water infrastructure? That is the point I was making, Mr. Speaker.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that since the formation of the Coalition Government, there has been a sense of exuberance, there has been a sense of confidence, there has been a sense of optimism, there has been a sense of freedom in this country...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We are confident, Mr. Speaker, as a Government - we are talking to investors, we are talking to those who are waiting for a change in Government, they are coming on board and you will see. the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications, is absolutely on the dot when he says that we know that we have created that confidence, we know that we will achieve significant economic growth in the years to come.



(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- And, Mr. Speaker, the most important thing that this Government will do is to manage the finances properly...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... cut on the wastages and make sure that we do not go on a spending spree like what they did for eight years.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, saying one time in the Budget that they were spending like drunks in a nightclub.

(Laughter)

But I also said that, at least, in the nightclubs, people were spending their own monies. The previous Government, Mr. Speaker, they were spending the taxpayers' money...

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order, honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is meandering. Please, no more verbal diarrhoea, stick to the point!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not like that, and I am sure that after a while, they will get used to this. We are not going to keep on bragging about what they did, but it is important for the people of this country, while we are putting out our plans, while we are saying what we are doing, and they do not talk about what we have done already. We did not wait for an election, we re-deployed funds, we helped more than 200,000 students in this country so that they could get to their schools without any problems with the appropriate gear. They do not talk about that, because they know, that the people out there are very happy. They are thanking the Government for taking their initiatives so early in their time. That is what the problem is. I hope that after a while, they will get used to this.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we have heard quite a mouthful from both sides of Parliament. I would like to thank the honourable Members of this august Parliament for their input and contribution. Of course, we really appreciate what has been shared already and I do not want to repeat quite a lot of issues that has been shared. We will take note of all the issues and the discussions.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the former honourable Members of this Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their contribution and the current Members of the Committee for their input.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

## **REVIEW REPORT ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION 2018 AND 2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the following Reports:

- (a) Review of the Electoral Commission Annual Report, 2018, which was tabled on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2022; and
- (b) Review of the Electoral Commission Annual Report, 2019, which was tabled on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2022.

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

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of this august Parliament, as the Member moving the motion, I rise to make a short contribution on the Reports of the on the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee on the review of the Fiji Electoral Commission Annual Report 2018 and 2019.

The two Committee Reports were tabled in the last term of Parliament and I will proceed directly to some of the main areas of discussion that are captured in these two Reports. For clarity purpose, I will first highlight the issues noted in the 2018 Report, and then onto the 2019 Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 2018 reported year, the Committee noted seven key findings identified by the previous Committee, which I wish to summarise as follows:

- (1) The Committee identified that the Electoral Commission had given the opportunity to all Fijians, even those who reside in very remote locations to be able to vote through pre-poll.
- (2) The Electoral Commission had achieved a milestone by successfully conducting another election for the year 2018, following the introduction of the D'Hondt system in the 2014 General Election.
- (3) The Electoral Commission was commended for its capability in addressing challenges encountered in the 2018 General Elections, including the spread of false news about election via social media and the bad weather conditions that hindered voters from being able to vote during election day.
- (4) The Electoral Commission was commended for the system in selecting the three-digit numbers to be used for candidate numbers. However, on the same note, it was noted that the system may cause confusion to the voters, given that more than one candidate may have a number comprising of three similar digits appearing on the ballot paper.
- (5) The Electoral Commission was commended for conducting election awareness in both urban and rural areas inclusive of villages, communities and schools.
- (6) It was highlighted that the 2018 General Election had a notable voter turnout compared to other countries that have the similar electoral system.
- (7) The Committee noted that there was insufficient gender related information provided in the Annual Report. However, after seeking clarification, the Committee commends the work

carried out by the Commission in empowering women and girls and promoting gender equality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 2019 Annual Report, the previous Committee identified four key findings, and these are:

- (1) The Commission has undertaken a review of the 2018 General Election and have identified the main areas of improvements with the focus on improving the processes that guide the Commission service delivery and ensuring acceptability of the election processes.
- (2) There have been key positive changes realised by the Commission, which strengthens its independence, whereby the Commission was able to control its own budget, which is separate from the Fijian Elections Office.
- (3) The Commission's Annual Report had insufficient gender related information, however, after consultation, it was encouraging to note that numerous activities and initiatives that the Commission was undertaking which promotes gender equality and empowerment of women.
- (4) The Commission had demonstrated that it also prioritises reducing inequality and promotes political inclusion of everyone in Fiji, even those who are living with a disability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these issues were addressed and clarified by the Electoral Commission and many information on this can be retrieved in the Committee's Report. I will go straight into the recommendations put forth by the previous Committee for the consideration of the Electoral Commission, which was intended for continued improvement in service delivery.

The Electoral Commission through the Fijian Elections Office continue with its advocacy programmes on the elections, which is in line with the Office's Strategic Plan 2020-2023, whereby, it aims to strengthen the electoral participation through effective outreach and engagement processes.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reiterate the Committee's comments on commending the Electoral Commission for the strides it has taken in improving many areas of their service delivery in the electoral system in Fiji. Given the achievements highlighted in the 2019 Report, it was noted that there were further improvements of election processes and numerous initiatives that the Commission was undertaking and to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and inclusion of all persons in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend and acknowledge the great work carried out by the previous Committee, and I further commend that Members of the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law, and Human Rights. With those few words, I urge that the honourable Members of this august Parliament take note of the contents of the Committee's Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor, I would like to inform honourable Members that about six speakers have volunteered to provide their input into the motion:

- (1) Honourable A.A. Maharaj;
- (2) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (3) Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice;
- (4) Honourable M.D. Bulitavu; and
- (5) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep it short as majority of the things has been covered by the current chairperson on what were some of the findings and what were some of the reasons that were given by the Electoral Commission and how they were actually addressing this, in particular the seven issues that were raised.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to basically talk about the involvement of women and their participation in Parliament. There had been a lot of concerns raised that the participation in Parliament with regards to women and gender equality is not enough. However, while talking to the Electoral Commission and Fijian Elections Office, I believe this is something that needs to be done at the party level rather than at Parliament level whereby we encourage at least 50 percent of our candidates be females. If we are able to endorse these kinds of policies at the party level, that will encourage more participation of females in Parliament. There had been calls previously of having certain seats reserved for women in Parliament, but at that point in time, the Committee came up with a fact that if we need to include them, it would be better to include them at a political level rather than just giving them seats in Parliament.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, was with regards to the civil society organisations not allowed to create awareness on the voting process itself and this was after the writ is filed. After the elections till the writ is filed for the next election, nothing is stopping the civil societies and NGOs to actually create this awareness. The only reason that was used to stop Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to create awareness was to take the ownership because if there is any kind of misinformation that is relayed by the CSOs, that would mean that no one could be held accountable as per the electoral laws to take them to task if they are providing any kind of false information or if there is any kind of misinformation that is causing confusion within the general public.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to speak about is people living with disabilities. They are a very integral part of our communities and we should ensure that these people are given a fair chance and it is not about taking them to the polling station but it is about taking the polling stations to them. One of the best ways that the Electoral Commission came up with this idea, was that if anyone living with disabilities, they should get themselves registered as postal voters. This would mean that the ballot paper along with the Election Guideline Book is actually sent to them for them to vote because they also have a say and it is very important that we include them in the decision making or as to how they can contribute towards the policy making and the making of laws. So, it is very important that we need to encourage the Electoral Commission to ensure that everyone living with disabilities, they are registered as postal voters. This also includes all those people who are at home who are elderly and sickly, and they cannot make it to the polling station on the day of elections. I encourage, in order to have your concerns raised in Parliament, it is very important to vote because we have seen that the voter turnout is going low and low.

We have had three elections by now and it is going down. We need to encourage, and I have said this in Parliament as well, we, as parliamentarians need to take a lead role in ensuring that the general public actually turns up to the elections office to vote on the day of election, whether it is on the day of election, whether it is through pre-polls or through postal voting, but it is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these people turn up to vote because every vote counts. If you want to have your say in the law-making process, it is very important to take this responsibility as Fijians to go and cast your vote. With those words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the work of the Committee and I support the motion.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief considering that the Report really only has one recommendation and that is with respect to its advocacy programmes that are required or for extension or more of it is actually required.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, this was actually the 2018 Election Report. I think we have gone past it by far but it is quite commendable in terms of what was achieved during that particular election. I think it was a successful one, conducted successfully, the Commission is actually commended for all the work that they have done. I do not see anything untoward that has actually come about it. Despite having quite a few challenges with weather and I think it is contained in the Report with respect to social media, et cetera that, that actually happened, we had a reasonable turnout. Honourable Alvick Maharaj is actually correct, I think the voter turnout numbers are getting low.

Maybe it is something that we need to address for the future but all in all, Sir, the Committee obviously has deliberated, this is not the current Standing Committee but this is deliberated on by the previous Committee which we have just sanctioned and I think everyone should be quite proud of the fact that we had an Electoral Office and Commission that conducted the 2018 elections without too much problems at all and I think it would have come out in the Report if there was. So, all in all, Sir, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide an input and debate on the review of the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2018 tabled on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2022 and the review of the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2019 which was tabled on the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on JLHR has extensively deliberated on the work of the Electoral Commission and I commend the Commission on the work they undertook in 2018 and 2019.

At the outset, the functions of the Commission as provided under the Constitution 2013 is to be responsible for the registration of voters, the conduct of a free and fair elections in accordance with the written law governing elections and any other relevant law, in particular, the registration of citizens as voters and the regular revision of the Register of Voters, voter education, the registration of candidates for election, the settlement of electoral disputes including disputes relating to or arising from nominations but excluding election petitions and disputes subsequent to the declaration of election results and monitoring and enforcing compliance with any written law governing elections and political parties.

Considering both reports, I note that the Committee has only made one recommendation that is reflected in the review of the Electoral Commission. The recommendation state and I quote:

“That the Electoral Commission through the Fijian Elections Office continue with its advocacy programmes on the elections, which is in line with the Office’s Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023 whereby one such goal is to strengthen electoral participation through effective outreach and engagement programmes.”

May I provide some insight into this? On 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2019, the Commission launched the FEO Strategic Plan 2020 – 2030. Pillar four of the Strategic Plan required the FEO to develop and implement effective public outreach and engagement programmes to strengthen electoral participation. However, on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, Fiji confirmed its first COVID-19 case and this pandemic was experienced throughout the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic hindered the plans of the Commission to implement effective public outreach and engagement programmes in the community which prompted the Commission to direct FEO to be innovative in its plans to achieve effective outreach and engagement programmes. In trying to achieve this, the FEO through the support of the Commission conducted three nation-

wide surveys from 15<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2020, 21<sup>st</sup> January to 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 and August 22.

The first survey received 14,137 responses. The second survey received 9,576 responses and the third survey received 8,154 responses. All surveys were done throughout the country and information was gathered through the Voter Survey App. The purpose of these surveys was to understand the behavioural pattern of the voters, their experience in the 2018 General Election, their preferred medium for receiving election information, test the success of the FEO 2018 Awareness Campaign, check whether their residential address and voter details were up to-date and find out if they knew how to vote.

This nationwide survey assisted FEO in developing and implementing effective outreach engagement programmes such as:

- (1) A stakeholder forum on enhancing voter participation which was hosted by the Commission and FEO on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2022. This forum was organised to address the low voter turnout recorded for 2014 and 2018 General Elections and look at ideal best practices and options to create a greater participation for the 2022 General Elections.

The various locals and international stakeholders attended this forum which included representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Electoral Commission, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) as well as those in the political parties, grassroots, youth, women's group, academics and members of the organisation for persons with disabilities. This forum laid the framework for the community engagement project ran by the FEO and the UNDP between 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 and 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2022.

- (2) The Community Engagement Project was undertaken in two phases. The aim of this project was to train and certify community election advocates and school election advocates so that they are able to go back to the community and conduct voter awareness on how to vote, when to vote, voter registration and other important election information.

The first phase was from 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 to 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2022 in which 208 community election advocates were trained and certified. These advocates were representatives of women and youth groups from religious organisations, settlements, villages as well as the *turaga ni koro* and district advisory councillors from all four divisions as well as members of the disability group.

The second phase was from the 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2022 until 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2022 in which the Social Science teachers and Year 13 students through the approval of the Ministry of Education were trained and certified. A total of 276 students and teachers in Suva, Labasa, Savusavu, Rakiraki, Ba, Nadi, Sigatoka, Lautoka, Navua and Nausori were accredited. The FEO through this project was able to reach 6,514 eligible voters from 87 respective school communities.

- (3) The FEO launched the “Know Your Election Campaign” which was a major voter awareness campaign conducted in the year of the General Election.

The first phase was running simultaneously with the nationwide voter registration drive from 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 to 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. Teams carried out awareness session in schools, villages and settlements and recorded 127,158 direct voter engagements. The

awareness session included flip-chart presentations on the electoral processes and voters were provided with election information booklet, how to vote brochure to assist them in understanding the electoral processes. The awareness ran concurrent with the registration and the team were deployed using the Rural to Urban Approach.

The second phase was later concluded from 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2022 to September, 2022. This focused more on the urban and semi-urban locations where majority of the voter population resides. In this phase, FEO took approach of taking registration and awareness to the doorstep.

Teams were deployed to densely populated settlements, urban hotspot, popular locations in individual streets such as supermarkets and sporting grounds, 60 teams were deployed for the five-week exercise. Each team had three staff who were Trained in Awareness and Voter Registration, 1,169 villages, 555 settlements and 174 schools were covered with 43,102 direct voter engagement. The main focus of this phase was to update the voter cards and inform them of the voting process and counting process.

- (4) Apart from the Direct Engagement Initiative, FEO also took advantage of the technology platform and established an election channel on *Walesi* which was set up, host videos created by FEO showing various electoral processes such as the voting processes, the counting of ballot papers and national candidates ball draw process. The FEO also pushed out the e-talk on *Facebook* which was a five-minute segment featuring conversations with the former SOE.

This followed a *talk back* show setup in which the former SOE was interviewed on various electoral processes or pressing issues relating to the elections work clarified. This encouraged direct engagement between FEO and the electors. An e-new segment was also pushed out on *Facebook* which provided an update and explanation of various electoral events. These initiatives were pushed out in 2022 and it was derived from the response of those that took part in the three surveys who indicated their preference of having such publications to be hosted in the social media and free to air television.

- (5) Mr. Speaker, Sir, another initiative was the Quiz Competition. On 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 the FEO ran a virtual quiz competition as part of the International Day of Democracy, celebrations which garnered a lot of interest from the public especially from young voters. The event was complemented with an extensive awareness campaign on the FEO's online platform, 256 teams took part in this competition.

Since then FEO has conducted 11 quiz competitions which had a total of 12,083 teams participating. The FEO wrapped up the quiz competition series with the last quiz on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2022. The quiz competition allowed participants to research and gain more knowledge and understanding on the electoral system in Fiji. The various electoral processes such as voting, counting and tabulation of results and also the methods of voting available in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although most of the initiatives were implemented in the Year 2022, at this juncture I would like to commend the Commission on its effort to try and strengthen electoral participation in such a tight timeline given that Years 2020 and 2021, the country experienced the COVID-19 pandemic which restricted direct engagement with the stakeholders.

I thank the Standing Committee for the recommendation of the Report, and I would like to reiterate that the Commission has managed to strengthen electoral participation through stakeholder

forum on Enhancing Voter Participation, Community Engagement Project, Know Your Election Campaign, Election Channel, E-Talk in use and Quiz Competition. I endorse the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament so that you may be able to enjoy your dinner and dinner is being prepared and served in the Big Committee Room. The Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.33 p.m.



The Parliament resumed at 7.30 p.m.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my comments on the motion that is before Parliament and that is on the Electoral Commission Annual Report 2018 and 2019. The contribution that we have heard from the honourable Attorney-General had talked about the preparations towards the 2022 Elections, but the Report confines us to the financial year 2018 and 2019.

Some of the things that came out of that was the report by the Fiji Elections Office on the successful 2018 General Elections and I agree with the honourable Attorney-General when he said that it was a free and fair Elections. That is the recommendation of the Committee that the Commission has made strides into conducting a second successful election in that particular year.

From then, we had the Multi-Observer Group (MOG) Report that also observed the 2018 Elections and they came up with few recommendations. That was part of the three Acts in 2020) - the Electoral Bill that was the Electoral Act 2014, Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013 and the Electoral (Registration of Voters) Act 2012.

Some of the things that came out of that public consultation as part of the observation by the MOG that resulted in some changes that was used in the 2022 General Election. One was the voter card that was amended to allow us to know our polling station which has to be part of the details in our voter card. That came in after a survey and a report from the 2018 General Elections conducted by the former Supervisor of Elections. Many gave the excuse that they did not turn up to their voting venues because they did not know their venue because the voter card then only talked about our polling station number or EVR number and did not specify our address.

Those are some of the changes that came out at that time and I would like to thank the former Attorney-General and also Minister responsible for Election for his leadership then in 2014 and 2018 that led to the now third successful election in 2022.

We, as honourable Members of Parliament as national leaders, we have the duty to always try to promote and advocate the credibility of our electoral system.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- One of the other things that came up from this exercise was the use of false information during campaign and the onus is on us as national leaders and politicians, when we move around the country during campaign, we must ensure that we always protect our electoral system. I do not discredit it, and that is something that we must all learn.

I thank the honourable Attorney-General in his contribution. Honourable Tikodudua, if you heard him properly, he actually praised the work done by the Commission and the former Supervisor of Elections and I thank him for giving credit to where it is due. If it was not for the hard work done by the former Supervisor of Elections, none of us would be here. That allowed the process for a fair election for political parties to campaign openly and also the process and many things that were told during the Elections that the Election will be rigged and all these lies that were commonly spread. But again, nothing, we have a change of government. But if we had wanted to win the Election, people said they will win the election because they will rig the election, but see what the result we have now. That all shows the good work that was done by the former Supervisor of Elections.

Despite other allegations that are probably pending (I will not talk about that), but again it is our duty that we always promote our electoral system.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Those are few things, Sir, that is part of all the single recommendation by the Committee to allow the Commission to create more advocacy to the public. We should not create fear amongst the people on the electoral system and we are the ones who should encourage them to come and vote.

The former Committee Chairperson had talked about the low voter turnout and we have the duty to encourage people. I always believe that most of our political arguments always discredit our electoral system which results in the low voter turnout. That should stop, Sir, because it will discredit the system that is already workable.

Before I take my seat Sir, I would like to respond to the honourable Minister of Finance when he replied to honourable Premila Kumar about the former FRCS Chairperson that was sacked from the regional body saying why he was chairing. Again, if you look closely at the Fiscal Review Committee, I think it is being chaired by someone too that is also questionable. He has also been convicted and awaiting sentence. The honourable Minister should also look into it if there could be another person to be Chairman instead of a convicted person.

If you see the pattern, for the last few weeks and today, a similar pattern is being used by the Coalition Government and always ending with the honourable Minister of Finance as the last speaker. He is slowly becoming a ‘one man’ government, Sir...

(Laughter)

Not only that, he used to say when he was on this side of Parliament, ‘the two men in Government plus the silent 25’. I can say now it is like the ‘silent 28 and the one-man government’.

(Laughter)

My statement should not threaten the other two political parties. They have got three Deputy Prime Ministers and I hope we see more of the two Deputy Prime Ministers and three participate a lot in summarising up the Government’s position.

Honourable Professor Prasad and I are from Macuata, so no need to worry. If you look around, these are some of the things we try and improve next time in our debate.

I thank the Committee for the work that they have done in reviewing the Report and one of the things that the Coalition Government should have done, they should have waited for the former Supervisor of Elections to table the 2022 Election Report before it came up with the decision to suspend him because that would have helped the Committee a lot on the review of the 2022 General Elections plus the Multi-Observe Group Report. That would have also improved our electoral laws for the 2026 elections. Those are lessons learnt.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are, obviously, looking at review of the two Reports; the Electoral Commission Annual Reports 2018 and 2019.

Mr. Speaker, as has been alluded by honourable Members, the Electoral Commission is probably one of the most important constitutional offices in any democracy and for the conduct of free and fair election. Under section 37(a) of the Financial Management Act all independent officers including the Electoral Commission should be adequately resourced, to ensure that they including effectively exercise their powers and perform their functions and duties.

So, just in terms of the 2018-2019 Financial year, the Fijian Elections Office was allocated a budget of \$20.4 million to carry-out the 2018 General Elections. However, giving the delay in the announcement of the Election date, the budget had increased to \$22.1 million - an increase of about \$1.7 million. Of this \$22.1 million, around \$500,000 was allocated to the Electoral Commission.

Mr. Speaker, the Government, through the Fijian Elections Office, spent \$22.1 million on the Election Day to conduct the 2018 General Election with the voter turnout of 71.9 percent. In fact, the donor contributions to the Elections Office because the donors were kept waiting so was the whole country in the two Elections 2018 and 2022 because the Government was not clear and sure when they wanted to hold the Elections, so a lot of the donors held back, and the support and assistance came in the last minute. So, the Ministry of Finance really has no record of that assistance provided directly by the donors to the Fijian Elections Office.

Mr. Speaker, a number of issues have been raised by honourable Members from the other side. The Election Commission, as I have said, is the most important institution in the conduct of elections anywhere in any democracy. It is the Electoral Commission which supervise us, which oversees the functions of the Elections Office and the Electoral Commission in good democracies, transparent democracies, accountable democracies, is the most powerful institution. They make specific contributions and determine the kind of laws, the kind of environment that they need to create for the conduct of free and fair elections.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyone knows, the honourable Members on the other side know and honourable Maharaj I thought provided a very good contribution. He actually talked about the lack of women participation in politics, in Parliament, he talked about the low voter turnout, especially amongst the women voters and we saw that in the 2022 General Election, so he highlighted those issues very well. But I think he held back, Mr. Speaker, from saying a little bit more as to why some of those things might have happened.

That is why the Electoral Commission must be powerful, must be independent, must be adequately resourced so that they take the responsibility, they actually advised the Government of the circumstances, the environment and perhaps, also the timing of the election in a country like ours. So all those factors such as cyclone season, holiday season and we saw that in 2022 Election, a lot of people, a lot of voters, people are not sure when the election is going to be held, people are planning for their holiday overseas, those from overseas were planning to come to Fiji, people were planning for holidays within the country and a lot of people actually left Suva to the islands because they did not know and they had booked their shipping routes and all the rest of it.

Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Commission, unfortunately, was not resourced and was not given the kind of information that it normally ought to have.

The way forward, Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that the Electoral Commission undertakes proper planning, not only in terms of advising on the appropriateness of an election date but also making sure that proper planning does not lead to additional cost to the Government. So improper planning, wrong timing whether it is to do with a cyclone, whether it is to do with flooding, rainy season, all those add cost to Government which could have easily been avoided.

In New Zealand, Mr. Speaker, the Government announces the election a year before it is held, it is transparent and open. We, Mr. Speaker, have not seen that in this country in the last two Elections.

The Electoral Commission is to strengthen the outreach awareness programmes independently and the Electoral Commission right now is currently in the process of internally reviewing the 2022 General Election. I think it is a good exercise and we hope to see appropriate reports from that review.

Mr. Speaker, I kind of remember there was this programme called *Kids Say the Darndest Things*. I have heard the most darndest things, honourable Bulitavu, just now. He was talking about individuals. That was the problem, a lot of them sitting on the other side thought that there were certain individuals who were indispensable.

We do not think like that, we believe in the strength of institutions. It does not matter who is in the position, if the institutions are strong, if the processes are strong, if there is transparency and accountability in governance whether you are in Government or Opposition, that makes it strong. So, it is a big joke coming from honourable Bulitavu who knows exactly what was there during the previous Government reign.

The systems, Mr. Speaker, also need to be improved. I mean, honourable Maharaj made a good point about women voters, but he did not talk about the fact that the Government actually brought in that stupid legislation which required women voters to go and change names and have new voter registration card.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of confusion about moving from Green card to a Blue Card. Towards the Election, we were told that we could use it again. Then we were told we could not use it. So, a lot of people, a lot of voters, Mr. Speaker, were confused.

I agree when they say we should not create fear but if you look at the Electoral laws, that is one of the things that the Coalition Government in good time is going to look at. Some of the most stupid, draconian and unnecessary electoral laws exist in this country.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Whether you talked about the Political Parties Act or the Electoral Act, it is just draconian. It creates fear in the laws itself, Mr. Speaker. When we were in the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that honourable Opposition Members would never feel the kind of fear that we felt as legislators in this Parliament when we sat in the Opposition for eight years.

We will make sure that they do not feel the same, that they have the freedom because the laws that they created was designed to strangle the Opposition and the Electoral Commission, unfortunately, was powerless and toothless. Basically, it was dictated by the Fijian Elections Office as to what they should do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very important Report and we must, as legislators, whether you sit in the Opposition or in Government, because we know these things can change. Today, we are in Government, tomorrow we are going to be in Opposition.

(Laughter)

And some of them sitting on the Government side, when we said Government will change, they said, “In your dreams!”. Well, I can say the same thing.

(Laughter)

I can say the same thing, but I will not, because we genuinely believe in democracy, transparency and accountability.

Now, Mr. Speaker, after being thrown into the Opposition by the people of this country, I hope that they will understand the true meaning of democracy, the true meaning of being in Opposition and the true meaning of being in Government. That is a lesson that they must learn and I know the honourable Leader of the Opposition will provide that counsel and guidance to some of them on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, with you, Sir, in that Chair, I can already see that we are having a real Parliament. We have created that environment and I think they must appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. They must appreciate the new Government for doing that.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that laws should never be made - keeping yourself in mind. I used to remind them, but over the last eight years, including the electoral laws, they made laws to suit themselves and the electoral laws were always designed to suit the FijiFirst Party, the Government at that time, because they wanted to put the Opposition off the rail. We, as a government are not going to do that, Mr. Speaker.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all honourable Members for the debate on the motion. Just a contribution from the motion on the floor, I totally agree with the former Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights with regards to our electoral system, we still need a lot of awareness on it. That is what I saw during the campaign, people in the rural areas still do not understand our electoral system. We need more awareness on that, and I hope we, as legislators, push for more awareness on this electoral system. May be that was the reason why there were no turnout on voters for the 2022 General Elections. We really need more awareness with regards to this.

With regards to this electoral system, I believe that it in such a way where we can compromise because in some places and areas, like honourable Maharaj was saying, the substitution for disability and the elderly needs to go by postal ballot. We must understand that in the rural areas this is not available to them. So how can the electoral system compromise with that?

We must keep in mind that voting is their right and they have to vote. This is what I came across during the Election, the ballot papers could not be taken to them and they are far in the rural areas, how can they access postal ballot. So, it is just more awareness and how we can compromise to see that the elderly and disability get the chance to vote, because it is their right and they have to vote.

Some are just deprived of this because they cannot come to the voting station, which is unfair on that end. Once again, with regards to our electoral system, it needs more awareness on the ground. With that note, Sir, I commend the previous Committee for their Report and thank the current Standing Committee on this Report and I thank all honourable Members on their contribution to the motion on the floor.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**QUESTIONS**Oral Questions

[Oral Question No. 40/2023 and Oral Question No 41/2023 were withdrawn]

Recruitment of New Teachers in 2023  
(Question No. 42/2023)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on what basis were new teachers recruited in the school calendar year of 2023 and how many?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the question I would like to respond to what honourable Bala had stated this morning on some teachers being issued with five year contracts.

Sir, the Ministry of Education wishes to reassure Parliament and the teachers who were issued those contracts that the Ministry is rectifying that oversight by ensuring that the contracts be rectified to be in line with the Cabinet Decision. On that, on behalf of the Ministry, I apologise for that oversight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the question that has been asked, I seek clarification on what the intention of the question was because the question that was asked is somehow confusing. The basis of teachers recruited into schools in 2023. Can the honourable Member clarify, is he requesting the criteria of appointment or the process of appointment because that is also linked to the second part of the question in terms of the number?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I need clarification on both.

(Laughter)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to state that in vernacular *o koya e vaka e taro kila tiko mai, se taro vakilakila tiko*. He already knows the answer to the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the former Head of Human Resources in the Ministry of Education, I have, no doubt, that already knows the answer to his question. Maybe, he has been given information from some of his friends within the Ministry, some of whom used to campaign for him and the former Minister for Education in the recent General Election.

But not to worry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are almost finishing the investigation and we will be forced to consider taking actions as that taken by both the former Minister and that of the former head of HR during their time ...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Then do it!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ... when they were terminating teachers who were allegedly to be politically-involved.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Do it, I challenge you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Or making political commentaries on social media.

I am obligated, Mr. Speaker, to respond to the question in any event for the 2023. The Ministry of Education has reviewed the recruitment process and is still reviewing, that was previously adopted by the Opposition party while it was in government.

The system adopted by the previous government, which is commonly known as the Open, Merit, Recruitment, Selection (OMRS). Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you may be aware, as a former Member of PAC and also the Members on that side of Parliament, one is not here now, they always raised concerns about the integrity and the fairness of this OMRS system.

From that time, we had voiced concerns about the basis of this system as there were many instances, teachers who were reaching out, seeking assistance because they were not called for the job test, for example, for heads of school appointments, processes even when they have the relevant necessary qualifications and the years of experience or when their employment contracts were up for review because they were very short contracts, some six months, some one year, others three years and more. Some teachers to this day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are still seeking justice for disparity in pay that they were given despite graduating at the same time, they were appointed at different salary bands. These issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are worrying and they point to a flawed system and I see that the honourable former Minister is shaking her head in agreement.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Oh, seriously. What else did I do?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- They point to a system which promotes injustice, bias, nepotism, cronyism and creates a very toxic work environment that can only affect teacher performances and students learning. Another example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the job test required as the main criteria for appointment which leaves aside important elements like the length of time a teacher serves in the field, experience in school and student management as heads of school.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we start appointing people based on exams we have reached an illogical place in our management of human resources and there can be no justification as to why it was even practised in the first place. The teacher unions have raised objections on these injustices and had pleaded for a better system but of course the arrogance of the former Minister, thinking their leadership would last forever, assumed a position of it is my way or the highway. One very simple lesson for the former Minister and her colleague, honourable Hem Chand is to remember that they are dealing with human beings who also have a tipping point. Even more important is to remember that when we are appointed to these positions of power, we are servants of the people, elected by them and they are the same people who will judge us come the next election. So, treat them with dignity.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education is undertaking a review of the OMRS system in consultation with the Public Service Commission and its relevance, and the review will accommodate the changes, the policy of government like the removal of contracts and the extension of retirement age to 60 along with the now removed “No Jab, No Job Policy.” We also continuously highlighted the shortage of teachers in the primary and secondary levels and we are working hard to resolving these shortages. As we have always publicly acknowledged, announced, the continuous shortage that is something that the Ministry of Education has always been challenged with.

In terms of the basis of recruitment for new teachers in 2023, one is through resignation. There were 377 in total to-date. Number two is deaths. There were unfortunately 28 deaths in total that occurred thus creating vacancies. Number three, there were also new establishments due to new schools. There were also new streams added to existing schools. For instance, there were eight-

teacher primary school and four-teacher secondary school recruited for Industrial Arts, Maths, Physics, Computer and *Vosa Vaka Viti* lessons. There were also recruitments to temporarily fill in for official leaves, for those undergoing in-service study leave or leave without pay or maternity leave, et cetera There were also teachers who had opted to retire despite the retirement age being extended to 60, fortunately 76 teachers have been re-engaged with two for ECE, 50 for primary education and 24 for secondary education.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had no intention to ask him any question but he actually compelled me to ask a question now. He is very well aware that the Fiji Teachers Union has written to the honourable Prime Minister regarding the appointments he is doing in his Ministry and in the same breath he is saying that the unions are very happy. This statement came out very clearly in the newspapers and it was reported.

My concern is, why did Fiji Teachers Union write to the honourable Prime Minister and not to the Minister? The reason is, they do not faith in this Minister despite the General-Secretary sitting there, who used to advocate for fairness but he is not doing anything about it. My question is, can the Minister explain ....

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am not the General-Secretary. Please withdraw that statement.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Former, former.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You didn't say former.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I did.

Talking about integrity, fairness of the system, honourable Minister, can the Minister explain how non-civil servants were recruited by the Ministry in the acting position?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question is related to teacher appointments. Non-teacher appointments, she can raise it in another sitting.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, school started on 30<sup>th</sup> January, it is very surprising to see that after two months of teaching and learning, some schools have teacher shortages. It was reported in the media last week that some schools in the rural areas and outer islands have teacher shortages and due to this, students are teaching themselves. This reflects badly on the Ministry and the honourable Minister. Can the honourable Minister confirm how many schools have shortage of teachers and by when this issue will be addressed?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be happy to provide the honourable Member with the statistics that he has asked if given the opportunity to present it as a Written Question. On the issue of shortage of teachers, he was the former head of HR, the mess he has created led to this. He should understand that.

Update of the Geodetic Datum  
(Question No. 43/2023)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the upgrade of the Geodetic Datum?



HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The Cabinet in 2015 passed the resolution that started the modernisation of Fiji's geodetic datum. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the geodetic datum is a coordinate system and set up reference points as it relates to planet earth. It is not really an everyday language for most of us but I suppose the best example that we can use is that the datum allows applications like the Global Positioning System or GPS to operate. As such the upgrade of the datum will determine the accuracy of that application and ensure for example, our air and sea navigation system is positioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the modernisation of Fiji's geodetic datum will position Fiji to comply with international standards and its requirements whereby changing, that is the ongoing work at the moment is changing the datum from model 1972WGS72 to WGS84. That is the present work that is being undertaken by the Ministry at this time.

Adopting the international standard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will ensure Fiji's compatibility across various geographic information systems that are used nationally, regionally and also at a global level. The current datum when compared to international levels has poor accuracy and with a significant difference or variance between five to twenty metres depending on the positions and locations. An example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this means that if we use the GPS in Fiji to locate a car, the information which the GPS will give will approximately be five to twenty metres off the actual position on the ground or if airplanes enter Fiji's airspace, pilots will have to switch on their switch from autopilot to manual in order to steer the plane safely onto the ground.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are four phases into this project. Phase 1 which includes procurement and construction, that has been completed between 2016 and 2018. Construction of eight hearts and pillars that presently at the moment shelter our Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) and they continue to operate from reference points that are located in Taveuni, Labasa, Nabouwalu, Koro Island, Kadavu, Lakeba, Ono-i-Lau and Rotuma. Those projects had been completed. Then procurements of five GNSS equipment, additionally three GNSS equipment was donated by the Republic of China which was commissioned on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2018.

Phase two involves the completion of the survey field campaign and synchronisation of field data conducted between 2019 to 2020. This has also been concluded which involves a total of 62 reference points were observed continuously for seven days and a total of 87 secondary reference points which were observed on a six-hourly basis.

Phase three, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has also been completed and it involves data release report produced from survey field data, online transmission of all geodetic survey data and information to Geoscience Australia through Pacific Geospatial Surveying Council, and also taking advice from Geoscience Australia to assist in the provision not only of geodetic datum but the physical height datum and geoid model transformation parameters standards, technical and documentation and educational materials at our Ministry.

Phase four, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is the final phase is pending and that requires a final and detailed process to complete the project. This phase involves activities like the formulation and completion of a Fiji Geospatial Reference System Roadmap undertaking the national adjustments to create the new Fiji Geodetic Datum and development of transformation parameters from historical datum to new datum. Discussion and agreement on height datum and geoid model development to create a new Fiji height datum. This will enable the datum to also capture the average height of the entire ocean surface, that is also measuring distance above our sea level.

There are some challenges Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I would propose that as a way forward in answering the question. There are technical issues that are experienced throughout these CORS

systems in Fiji. Systemic faults on the internet connectivity for the CORS stations. The Ministry has support from ITC to evaluate service providers for internet services in which *Walesi* and *Digicel* had been awarded service right for the outer islands CORS stations. Technical capacity. Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the lack of know-how in the field of geodetic. So, at the moment Mr. Speaker, Sir, assistance has been pursued with Geoscience Australia to provide training and those involved in the project.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the infrastructure safety and maintenance is also a challenge where periodic maintenance of the compound in which our CORS stations are built needs to be maintained and in doing so, we have four offices altogether and one IT person that do periodic check on all of our CORS stations to make sure that they are compliant and also giving us the feed of information that we need.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the inclusion of the vertical datum will enable the Ministry to measure rates of subsidence or land sinking which is the result of development of coastal erosion and ground water withdrawals. For instance, if the Government does not have accurate elevation information about these routes, hurricanes and waterways, evacuees during emergencies may be trapped in fast rising water situations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the inception of this project, the Ministry has only been focusing on developing horizontal datum, the inclusion of high datum as advised by Geoscience Australia which will also then allow Fiji to be well placed to take advantage of the widespread benefit of having satellite based positions systems in Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Minister thank you for the explanation. With respect to the transformation that is actually happening, you mentioned the World Geodetic System has been used. I do understand also that you have the Fiji Map Grid which is 1986. From what I understand, there is a transformative exercise into the international terrestrial reference frame which is going to be the final frame that we are going to use.

In simple term, Sir, what we are asking is, what is actually going to be the benefit that we will accrue to every Fijian and specifically to the Maritime Sector considering that we have rising sea levels.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, I mentioned when I answered the question that what would happen when we improve the system in its position. The position of information that was going to be available to every citizen of this country. When we improve the system, we would get rid of the five to 20 metres variation or variance that presently exist in our GPS at the moment. Once we update it and it comes to par with international standards, we can be sure about locations and positions, that would be able to help us predict things that we need to do in the future.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a follow-on question Sir. I know that our navigation charts are already on World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS84). The land maps are on 72 and migrating from that datum to the international datum which is WGS84 will mean that our maps may change, the land maps that we have because we are going to use a new datum.

My question is, will that affect the nautical charts that we have, given there is a little overlap between our land, maps and our nautical charts because in nautical charts, the tidal reading is taken right up to our foreshore or have they consulted with our Hydrographic Unit.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- From my briefing on how it will affect, how we see things at the moment, there is a possibility that with the upgrade of the system it obviously is going to affect how maps are going to be read. But that, of course, is something that the Ministry is going to have

to work with stakeholders to make sure that our map systems in the upgrade of the system that we have is going to resolve all of the unintended consequences of bringing in a new system over and above and outlay of an old system.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Sir, a supplementary question. Can the honourable Minister explain the difference between a geodetic datum and map projections?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I could not get that question whether it was supplementary to the main question that was asked by honourable Tubuna?

MR. SPEAKER.- Could we note that as a new question?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- No, it is not a new question.

MR. SPEAKER.- We are talking controls here.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the Ministry staff and the honourable Minister. They are very glad to see that we are finally able to get the information, the data across to Geoscience Australia - something that the team have been working for a long time. I am glad that we are getting to that stage and very soon we will have the new datum that will make things a bit more accurate. Once the new datum is in, there will of course be policies, legislations, regulations that have to be adjusted as such.

I do not think you are probably in a position here to decide what those will be. In the future to make sure that the accessibility of this information is more accessible to users, there might be a need to intensify the network of the core stations. I am just wondering if there are already plans in place to intensify the network to make sure that the information is more accessible to those that were wanting to use those CORS station data?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, that was something that the Ministry staff had briefed me about when I assumed the office at the Ministry for Lands and Mineral Resources. There is a challenge at the CORS Stations and I can assure the honourable Member that, that would be something that we would consider to make sure that it is improved.

Budgetary Allocation – Overseas Sports Tour  
(Question No. 44/2023)

HON. A. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament what types of travel are included in the Ministry's Budget Allocation for the Minister and Ministry staff to undertake overseas sport tours?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the former Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports for his question. The travel budget for the Ministry has fund allocated for all official travel locally and overseas (for staff and the Minister) are aligned to youth and sports purposes. However, Cabinet approves all overseas travel for Ministers and funds are reimbursed from the Ministry of Finance for Minister's overseas travel. The Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports approves all overseas travel and funding for Ministry staff.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a sports supplementary question. Does the budget for sports tours of staff of the Ministry allow them to go or is it programmed as such if they

have to go to two events overseas, they go to one in North America, have to fly back to Fiji and then fly back to North America. Is that the normal way in which such trips are planned or is that out of the ordinary and would that be an excess wastage of Government resources?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the supplementary question. I was directed by the honourable Prime Minister to accompany the IRB Sevens tournament on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February for LA and 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March to Vancouver 7s respectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji 7s team is one of the most successful rugby 7s teams in the World and history shows our Fiji has performed at the world class level, winning numerous rugby 7s titles. By far, the great accomplishment has been winning the Gold Metal at both the 2016 Summer Olympics Games in Brazil and 2020 Olympics Games in Japan. Fiji has been continuously praised for natural talents on the international stage and it seems the Fijian flare has become a must have accessory for every nation.

Fiji is also famously known as friendly and the national rugby team as true Ambassadors of the *bula* spirit. Fiji Men's Rugby 7s Team won another Olympic Gold Medal at 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics while the Women's Fijian Team stunned the World with a Bronze Medal. In simple terms, Sir, from the directive of the honourable Prime Minister, I had to be in attendance with the Fiji Rugby Team in both the Los Angeles and Vancouver legs of the Rugby 7s.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what was the role of the honourable Minister at HSBC World Rugby 7s Series Tournament in Los Angeles and Vancouver which he attended at the cost of taxpayers money and how did Fiji benefit through his attendance?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Apart from taking time to empower the players and watch their performance, I met with Mr. Richard Sharma a Nike representative in Vancouver, visited the famous Sydney Cricket Ground with a tour of their sports museum and the new Allianz Stadium. The Ministry is considering the setup of a sports museum under the Fiji Sports Council to commemorate the contribution of sports and sports players in our development as a nation, for which a Cabinet paper will be submitted.

I met some Fijians in Vancouver who were interested in investing back to Fiji, met with a representative from Pacific Trade Invest of Australia and how we could address some youth issues.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister confirm that from Los Angeles you had to come back to Nadi and then go back to Vancouver because someone in your office failed to organise your ticket from Los Angeles, is it true?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, I thank you for the question. It is true that I had to come back to Sydney for my visa to go to Vancouver because it was at a short notice. Am I answering your question?

MR. SPEAKER.- You do not have to worry about that honourable Minister.

Progress and Benefit – SPARTAN  
(Question No. 45/2023)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the progress and benefits Fiji will derive from hosting the

SPARTAN Event?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Tunabuna for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond, I wanted to share with honourable Members of Parliament and those watching us today that over the weekend we welcomed back our direct flight from Hong Kong and today we are welcoming back Narita, Japan. This is a key milestone, not only for Fiji Airways and the tourism industry but also for business, investments, trade and the people of Fiji.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Hear, hear!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the sitting of January 2023, Cabinet endorsed the hosting of SPARTAN Trifecta event in Fiji for a three-year partnership - 2023, 2024 and 2025. The first Spartan event will be held from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, SPARTAN is a series of obstacle races of varying distances, attracting a wide global audience from the fitness minded to the seasoned elite athletes. Each SPARTAN event is held at unique locations that combines terrain and unique natural features like creeks and mountains as well as manmade obstacles, a lot like a challenge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many ways to market a destination, whether it is a music festival, sporting, religious gathering, cavalry events or major conference. We have done in the past and we have seen its benefits. So, by bringing SPARTAN into Fiji, which is new to Fiji, we are showcasing our ability to host global events and reach global audience. Participants come in numbers, often with their families and spend money in our economy. They then go back to the countries and share their experience, attracting more visitors and often becoming repeat visitors themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been working very closely with Tourism Fiji and the SPARTAN Team in the lead up to the November event. On 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2023, the Ministry signed an MOU with SPARTAN Australia setting the framework of a partnership with the organisers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since signing the MOU, we are now negotiating the legal agreement which shall outline the responsibilities and expectations in the event delivery. As endorsed by Cabinet, we have now established a Public Private Sector Steering Committee made up of our Ministry, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, iTaukei Land Trust Board, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Tourism Fiji, Fiji Airways and the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the first Steering Committee meeting and tomorrow together with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to undertake a site visit to ensure all protocols are followed with respect to landowners. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, tourism has produced a SPARTAN promotional video which has been released on their pages. We have also developed a page on the Fiji Tourism website, for all things SPARTAN essentially putting out the message on why do SPARTAN in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an industry webinar online meeting was held last week with Tourism Fiji, Fiji Airways and the organisers where we spoke about the event to move the industry partners involved. Four properties have already released spartan packages, they are Vomo, Tropica Island Resort, Plantation Island Resort and Marriot. So, there is a lot of excitements.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this year we are looking up to 3,000 participants from Fiji's key source markets staying throughout Nadi and the Coral Coast regions. Directly in terms of economic benefit,

the event organisers using its moral forecast total revenue, over approximately \$12 million per annum without a multiplier. This includes an estimated \$1.2 million in spend by the event organisers and \$10.8 million in participant spend.

Now if you take a very basic calculation, based on an estimate of 3,000 participants, staying at least four nights, we are looking at approximate return on investment of \$9.3 million. This looks at the departure tracks, accommodation, food and beverages, transport and airfare and this is without applying any multiplier. On media value as I mentioned, the event has been forecasted on quarter one, media value of \$2.750 million. Fiji will be the exclusive trifactor location for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, so a great marketing exposure for the Fiji brand. Like other major events, the event will be showcased through strategic television advertising, broadcast, social media, campaigns, et cetera.

Indirectly, local suppliers and communities will be engaged in construction, catering, apparel, electronics, transport and entertainment. The event will look at various locations such as Sabeto so that we spread the benefits and exposure. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue work with the SPARTAN organisers through the Steering Committee to ensure that the event delivers a maximum exposure and benefits for Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is kind of two-folds and I am not sure if you are going to allow it. Firstly, how much is the input from the Fijian Government with respect to this particular event? Secondly, I did not quite catch what the marketing dollars gain in this is going to be?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our contribution to this is \$750,000 a year for three years. You look at the return on investment on that, you are talking about \$12 million in actual spend, not taking into account the multiplier. The multiplier is the way it multiplies in the economy. So, dollar to dollar, \$750,000 for \$12 million return in direct receipts.

The other question was the marketing spend. The marketing spend is, can I share this with the honourable Member later on. The medium value, Mr. Speaker, is \$2.750 million on the first quarter alone on marketing spend.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick supplementary question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister. What sort of numbers are we looking at? Although I am aware of what will be online in terms of viewers, but how many people are we expecting roughly on our shores? The only reason why I am asking this, Sir, is because of room capacity, and given the influx of whatever into the country, because this is one of our constraints as well when it comes to hosting major events?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have highlighted it is going to be in November. November is one of the low months for Fiji. The whole of Nadi and Coral Coast will be accommodating these 3,000 people. There will be people who will stay in Five Star Resorts and there are those who stay in backpackers. Nadi, Denarau, Nadi Airport environment and the Coral Coast have a range of accommodation to accommodate these 3,000 people during this period. So, in terms of accommodation, we can cater to these kind of numbers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can just relate to a situation where we had the Golden Oldies in Nadi. The whole of Nadi for one week was just full of the delegates that when they left Nadi, we felt like there was a big vacuum in Nadi. Such was the impact during that particular week when we had the Golden Oldies. I see something similar during this period. It is going to be huge for Nadi. The

cafes, taxis, it is just about everyone could feel the impact of these 3,000 people staying in Nadi and the Coral Coast during his period.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to see the measures being taken for sports tourism and other forms of tourism to bring in much needed revenue. One of the things that I am interested in is the amount of exposure that Fiji gets as a result. If you recall, not too many years ago, we used to have the Fiji International Golf. We had people like Vijay Singh and Ernie Els come. There used to be a lot of derogatory and negative comments about it, but I think the media exposure that Fiji got was phenomenal, especially when you have large names like that coming to the country. I am just thinking, compared to that kind of media exposure and the long-term benefits of that kind of exposure, what kind of media exposure worldwide globally will result as a result of this SPARTAN compared perhaps to events like the Fiji International Golf?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SPARTAN people are very committed. As I said, some are elite athletes. Fiji is the centre for this during the next three years, and they have followers in the United States of America and North America. So, we see it as quite huge in terms of the exposure within the SPARTAN community, which itself is quite huge.

Trends of Domestic Violence  
(Question No. 46/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on the trends of domestic violence up to the present day?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. There is a lot of data involved in this question and actually the source is the Fiji Country Gender Assessment, which I had spoken about last week, which has been launched. Also, the data itself is available to Members, if they wish to get that data. Suffice to say, I think the trends of domestic violence in our country to this day is something that is a national shame. We have higher than the average of the world average, which is one out of three women.

Two out of three women in Fiji faces some form of violence. In fact, it should be something that we as a Parliament should pursue and support to declare it a national crisis. It has really reached that stage and it has been a number of years that governments have tried to tackle this issue, including the previous government, and of course this is something that has fallen upon the Government now. It is really worrying in terms of our trend being above the global average.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just some very quick statistics on this, is that apart from the two out of three women who face some sort of intimate partner violence, the forms of violence that are prevalent and severe are hitting, kicking, driving, choking, burning or being threatened with a weapon. From these statistics, these are 15 percent of the women state that they attacked while pregnant. While pregnant, they are being punched or kicked in the abdomen. The proportion of women who have been beaten during pregnancy is significantly higher among younger women. So, it is increasing.

Nearly six in 10 women over their lifetimes are subjected to emotional violence. I talked about physical violence, now we are talking about emotional violence.

The men who exert control over their spouses, it talks about controlling behaviour. The most common form of sexual intimate partner violence is marital rape, and that is in the statistics too. Marital rape is the most common form. Also, Mr. Speaker, women who face economic abuse, report

that about 28 percent of women face economic abuse from a husband or *de facto* partner either they forcibly take their savings or earnings, or they refuse to provide money for food and expenses, and so this is the form of economic abuse that women face.

Mr. Speaker, we know the data that the Fiji Police Force puts out every year and the crime against women and children. The biggest portion, Mr. Speaker, 73 percent are between the age of 18 to 35. So again, they are in the youth population, the young women who are facing this.

Mr. Speaker, very quickly just on the Domestic Violence Helpline in terms of the number of calls that we receive. Of course, there was a spike in it during COVID-19 2020 and then in 2021, it doubled in just the first half of the year from 2020. Again, Mr. Speaker, in 2021 which is again the recent statistics provided, women are reporting, there is an increase in reporting, but they are reporting increased aggressiveness and intensified physical violence, and this includes burnt with hot soup, punched, kicked or dragged by the throat, whipped by their husband on horseback, threatened with knives or other objects such as bricks, stones, gardening spades, garlic pounder and firewood. So, Mr. Speaker, the data does not lie. It is actual data that is available from the Bureau of Statistics and also collected through the Domestic Violence Helpline and also our workers.

The business cost for violence, we lose 10 workdays in a year because of violence faced by women and again, those who are worried about women facing violence, they say that they are distracted or unwell or feel tired from work or they are late or absent from work because they are worried about the person going through it and supporting colleagues also face some sort of violence as a result of it. They get the shrapnel or collateral damage being involved.

Mr. Speaker, there are things that the Ministry is doing at the moment which includes, we are very excited about launching the National Action Plan to prevent violence against all women and girls. This makes Fiji the first Pacific Island country and only one of two countries globally to have a National Action Plan to prevent violence against women before it starts, Mr. Speaker, and this is yet to come to Cabinet and to be approved but it is again based on data and evidence, about the root cause of violence. What is the root cause of violence? It is patriarchy, Mr. Speaker. The entitlement that power has over women and women are not entitled to the same rights.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry would really like to see this is as something that we can declare as a national crisis because of what our women and girls face, and we hope that Parliament will support this, should we bring it here.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Thank you, honourable Minister for your response. How does your Ministry engage with marginalised communities who may face additional barriers to accessing services and support?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you for the question, honourable Member. The Ministry is now undertaking working with service providers in the community. We are actually yet to bring Domestic Violence Shelter Guidelines to be approved so that our service providers who are in the community can provide shelters for our women who are facing violence, as well as our children who are a part of the families that face violence. The shelter guidelines are needed, Mr. Speaker, because we have homes that have opened up but yet to come under the Ministry officially, so that we are able to monitor and ensure that the services provided or the guidelines of those shelters are proper and meet certain standards.

Mr. Speaker, we are also looking at the issue of children who are involved in or caught up in violence. We hope that we are able to also encourage more employers to look at providing childcare in workplaces. It is something that International Finance Corporation (IFC) is working with the



Ministry and that will also need Cabinet approval but it will be funded by the employer so that the children are at workplaces then if mum or dad are working then they are not worried so much about what is happening to their children, they become more productive and we hope too that that will reduce the amount of child abuse that we also face which is four out of five children.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, honourable Minister. My question is, are there any plans to increase the funding for domestic violence in terms of the prevention and response programme in the coming years?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Member. We are very excited to announce that our bilateral partners have come on board to fund the roll-out of this National Action Plan to prevent gender-based violence. Our visit to New York, I was able to meet with our partners there who have committed between \$3 million to \$5 million in the next few years to roll-out this Plan.

This Plan also includes a very effective communications campaign because we need to inculcate this information to the public through an effective communications campaign. We also got to revisit our school curriculum so that we can educate our children about the need to prevent violence in our homes and in our families. So that is the kind of funding we are looking at to supplement what the Government is committing in the financial year.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Minister is related to the conflicting information that gets exposed to the public. For example, recently we heard from Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, they claimed that because of the new Government, domestic violence reduced whereas the Fiji Police Force came forward with their data saying that there is an increase in domestic violence. So, my question to you is – how do you deal with this conflicting information when it comes to advocacy and you are trying to change the behaviour?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Member. I understand the information that came from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre was that there was a reduction in calls received from the Domestic Violence Helpline, not necessarily a drop in domestic violence. They saw a drop in the calls that were received from the Domestic Violence Helpline which the Government gives a grant for, so that is part of their reporting to the Ministry. They just reported it factually, as far as that opinion that was given, that is not the opinion of the Government.

We still need to look at the statistics as is and importantly working with our stakeholders like the Fiji Police Force as well as the other service providers and to work together because the numbers, according to the Fiji Country Gender Assessment and the information received, we are still sitting at two out of three women who are facing violence. We really need to do something about that and I hope that is something that we as a Parliament, we as legislators and as a whole country can come together to address.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one supplementary question for the honourable Minister. Can the honourable Minister for Women provide more clarity because she spoke about her recent trip to the United States of America on the UN Commission on the Status of Women Session. Can she please provide more clarity on the outcome and output from this event?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you honourable Member for that question. I think this is a new question but the Commission on the Status of Women, I am planning to address, I think there is a question later in the week than I will be able to address that question and give full information on the outcomes of event.

Status of the National Security Strategy  
(Question No. 47/2023)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration inform Parliament on the status of the National Security Strategy?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. For the benefit of those that perhaps, I am sure we would all understand the national security strategy but for the benefit of those that do not quite understand the subject, it is the overarching strategy that sets the agenda and policy intentions of government with respect to national security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment Fiji does not have one purely because there have been processes in the past where national security strategy was going to be established. That had gone through certain processes but did not eventually complete the process of Cabinet to endorse it and then from which the national security strategy would be derived and everyone works from there.

Now, earlier on at the beginning of this Parliament, I had made known Government's intentions that we would like to conduct a Security and Defence Review and the outcome of that will also develop the national security strategy. This has been discussed both with the traditional and non-traditional security areas that affect Fiji generally as a nation.

Our national security strategy in the recent past has been led by defense and uniform personnel. This one that we are going to do is going to be civilian led and will involve a committee that will lead the process. At the moment, I have a terms of reference that is on my desk that is actually taking shape and is undergoing consultation in terms of what will become the terms of reference that will guide this process at the end. So, everyone in Fiji including our friends from the other side of Parliament will have the opportunity to air their views with regards to the defense and security aspects of our nation. Obviously, these things are interesting subjects today, I think in our region, in the whole of the Southern Hemisphere is looking up to perhaps worried about what is happening on the Taiwan's Gate and how things have developed and how things have shaped security in our region.

We have seen how the big players have come down lately, we know how the non-traditional sectors have affected the way that the whole of our national life has been affected in the past. The national security covers not just defense or security in general, it is the area that we know but covers essentially every other aspect of all of our national life. So, we will have the opportunity to do that and like I said, when that process is ready and hopefully we can develop something that will take place this year and then by next year we should be able to put through the parliamentary papers to discuss it in the Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you honourable Minister for your response, but probably I will just ask one quick supplementary question. You have talked about traditional and non-traditional threats. Non-traditional threats particularly two that are of concern to us not only to us but perhaps this is consistent in the region is on climate change and cybercrime. I want some explanation from you honourable Minister on perhaps how this will be approached particularly given the significance and the relevance of these two non-traditional threats, Sir.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question - very relevant. Obviously, on the issue of climate change, we are looking at the security of the world as a whole and we are looking at Fiji as a nation. With respect to climate change

in general throughout the world. So, this is also going to form part of that review in terms of how Fiji will best attack it, I know in other areas of the economy in terms of the climate mitigation fund and what has been done through the COP process is going to provide us with the kind of information which best suits us, so the Committee will also look at that.

In terms of cybercrime, I think I addressed a little bit of this last time. This is one big area of vulnerability today as the honourable Leader of the Opposition would know. We are so vulnerable in that area that we have threats everyday. I think we had a short experience of ITC getting hacked the last time and the affected areas like iTLTB in their data. One of the major concerns is that there are many cybercrime attacks in Fiji that are not reported particularly in the business sector because they worry about that. If they make this public, then the integrity of their business becomes questioned as well. So, we realise this gap that we have, we do not have the national capacity right now to deal with it. It is something that every other nation is dealing with ongoing.

We have a team that is coming down from Canberra from the border force, as I said the other said to try and help us out on how we can at least fix that part. But there are other areas that we have to invest in, and the Committee is really going to look at that because as part of the national defence and security review, this is one other area that they will look at - cybercrime and also drug is a big one. How do we deal with this non-traditional area that really is affecting our national security and our children and we are talking about domestic violence, what is the cause of that? So, those are other range of areas that the Committee can look at.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick supplementary question to the Minister, talking about national security strategy and the defence review. Is it happening concurrently or are you going to go for the strategy first before you do the defence review?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- It is the strategy that needs to be defined first, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and part or born out of that is looking at defence as a whole and how we translate. As I said earlier, civil primacy is important which is the whole area that the government is looking at - the primacy of civil power in looking at defence traditionally as we look at it. So, this is one area where Government is looking at to review the defence functions that we have right now. There is no hiding behind anything, that is, we have already discussed that at many levels and how best to do that, there is a constitutional role.

I do not want to go in too much detail because that is really the work of the Committee to look at it, but the defence has become part of it and not only defence, even though wider look at, the Fiji Police Force at the moment we are working on a process called "Policies of Restoring Blue". So, restoring blue is looking at how to relook at the culture and the professionalism of the Fiji Police Force to take it back to the way that traditionally the police would see it. So that is one part of it because immigration falls under this portfolio as well, so we are going to look at border security as part of that too.

It is a very transparent process where the people of Fiji can then openly talk about this – that is the whole idea. It is not going to be contained, it has to be civilian-led and it will be civil-led. Obviously, RFMF would play a big part, Police, border, and of course politically and the private sector. Something we must do well, obviously like I said, there is nothing that defines defence right now. There is also the roles that they have independently which they do, that is about all. They assume their roles right now but there is not a guiding strategic document by Government that points out the policy path, maybe you would like to go into the future. So, that really Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the intent of all this exercise that we want to do. People will have their chance to talk and share their views including honourable Members on the other side.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, Fiji has always lived by the tenet “friends to all and enemies to none.” In the development of this strategy, bearing in mind the actual geopolitics of the region and in terms of influence being exerted on Fiji by different development partners et cetera that we have had, how much of a role will that geopolitics of that particular region actually play within the development of this particular strategy?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- It is going to be huge, honourable Member. I think regional politics is really shaping the way we are even in the non-traditional sectors. We have got to look at countries where we share traditional alliances with. It is also the morale of a good nation chooses its principle well. Politics are fine, be it a small nation, we try to attach ourselves to as many places where we can get help, but at the end of the day, we always want to stand tall as well for the kind of principles that we stand for. So, hopefully the people of Fiji can tell the Committee when they look at this review the kind of places where they look at Fiji and where it is to go in light of what is happening in the South.

Without going too much into the details of the geopolitics which we understand, I think at the beginning of the year after the elections, Australians rushed here, the Chinese rushed here, the Americans came afterward, we still got the French, everyone wants to come in. Geopolitics will define it.

We have got AUKUS right at our doorstep, threat of nuclear energy and nuclear power shapes everything that we have but the people must have a say. At the end of the day, we are a democratic nation, we want a democratic framework, traditional alliances are also very important to us as well as our trading partners. But it is always good to stand for something, it is the morally right thing to do.

### Written Questions

#### Detailed Information and Data – YES Recipients (Question No. 48/2023)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communication update Parliament on the following -

- (a) The specific grand information for each recipient of the “Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) launched in 2018, and data on the tax dollar value per annum, by quarter, as disbursed by the Ministry – by name, date, locality (village or rural community centre), division, ethnicity and gender for the period January 2018 to 23 December, 2022; and
- (b) The current status of every grantee to-date.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

#### FRA Expenditure on Individual Projects (Question No. 49/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport provide the list of individual projects under each of the following categories of Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) Expenditure, their budgeted amounts, the forecasted amount committed or spent, and reasons for any underspent as per the end of Quarter 3 Financial Year 2022-2023:

- (a) Road/Corridor Maintenance -
  - i. Sealed Road Maintenance – Potholes repairs
  - ii. Footpaths
  - iii. Traffic services (signs, railings, lining, et cetera)
  - iv. Unsealed
  - v. Drainage
  - vi. Vegetarian control
- (b) Streetlights Maintenance –
  - i. Electricity
  - ii. Electrical maintenance (streetlights/traffic lights)
- (c) Structure Maintenance –
  - i. Bridges
  - ii. Crossings
  - iii. Jetties
- (d) Emergency Maintenance;
- (e) Sealed Roads Rehabilitation;
- (f) Unsealed renewal;
- (g) Renewal bridges, crossings, jetties?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Relocated Villages & Communities – 2018-2022  
(Question No. 50/2023)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ 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 list of villages and communities that were relocated to higher grounds since 2018 to 31st December, 2022 due to climate change, and also provide the relocation cost per project?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister will table his response at a later date permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Recruitment of Teachers – Retirement Policy  
(Question No. 51/2023)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

As a result of increasing the retirement age from 55 to 60 years, can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on:

- (a) How many retired teachers have been recruited and in which field in secondary schools or which class in Primary school in 2023;
- (b) How many new graduates have been recruited in the teaching workforce in 2023;

- (c) Provide a breakdown of the number of teachers and their area of expertise in the waiting pool; and
- (d) How many surplus teachers are there in the system and provide a breakdown of the number of teachers and the subject they teach?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response according to the Standing Orders.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.18 p.m.