

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

The Parliament resumed at 9.40 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable P.K. Bala and the honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 11th September, 2023, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

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

Back to Office Reports

For the information of all honourable Members, the following Back to Office Reports will be made available in the Library for your perusal and reference, the:

1. Report on the 7th Meeting of the Asia Pacific Parliamentarians Forum on Global Health in Mongolia; and
2. *Tuākana, Tēina, Whenua, Talanoa' wānanga* at the New Zealand Parliament.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report - Levuka Town Council 2012 and 2013 Annual Reports

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, please, allow me to first wish the very best to all our sons and daughters returning to school this morning.

Mr. Speaker, better late than never, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Under 18 Rugby team of Queen Victoria School that won the Fiji Secondary School Vodafone Deans Final. I would also like to thank the technical coaches, the teachers, the team management, the old boys and

especially, the parents that had supported the Team throughout the session. I would like to acknowledge the teams in the various grades from Under 14 to Under 19 that performed exceptionally well during the season.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank and acknowledge all the schools that took part in the Fiji Secondary Rugby Competition and the teams that came out winners of their respective grades.

MR. SPEAKER.- You should have declared your interest there.

(Laughter)

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 review of the Levuka Town Council Annual Reports for the Years 2012 and 2013. 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, the Levuka Town Council 2012 and 2013 Annual Reports were referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs during the previous Parliament term. In this new term of Parliament, both the Annual Reports were re-introduced and referred to the current Standing Committee through the normal process for report scrutiny. The Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Reports and report back on its findings.

Mr. Speaker, the vision of Levuka Town Council is “to uphold the significance of Levuka’s heritage to derive sustainable livelihoods for all”. The Mission is “to promote economic growth through improved partnerships and efficient service delivery”.

Mr. Speaker, during the years 2012 and 2013, the Council highlighted a few events that made it special, for instance, the courtesy visits from the Special Administrator (Rakiraki) for the Levuka and Rakiraki tourism partnership; the Director of Local Government and Chief Executive Officer Nadi; the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment; and the Parliament Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Mr. Speaker, further to the above, the Council carried out the following activities, it:

1. launched the Nomination Dossier and later Levuka Town Council was inscribed in the World Heritage Listing;
2. hosted the arrival of *Uto ni Yalo*; and
3. increased human resource capacity to enhance the services provided by the Council.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee acknowledged the work carried out by the Town Council in 2012 and 2013, and it also noted the challenges and opportunities that Levuka can build on to boost its economic viability and its status as a Municipal Council. Therefore, I take this time to acknowledge the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament for their effort and input, which have assisted the current Standing Committee in the completion of this Report.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the current Members of the Standing Committee for their valuable input and support. I extend my gratitude to the Special Administrator and staff of the Levuka Town Council for their timely assistance in this review process.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament

and request that all honourable Members of this august Parliament take note of the Report.

(Report handed over to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, 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 date.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Tavua Town Council 2015 Annual Report

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present another report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of the Tavua Town Council Report for the Year Ended 2015. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), which mandates that the Committee look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

Mr. Speaker, the Tavua Town Council Annual Report was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs during the 2018–2022 Parliament term. However, in this new term of Parliament, the Annual Report was reintroduced and referred to the current Standing Committee through the normal process for report scrutiny. The Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

It was good to note that in 2015, the Tavua Town Council assisted stakeholders in achieving its ultimate objective by recognising its contribution to socio-economic development which uplifts the standard of Tavua Town. For instance, the Council assisted the Ministry of Agriculture in organising the Agriculture Show in Tavua. This was the first of its kind and it was an advantage for the people of Tavua to witness activities and programmes piloted by the Ministry of Agriculture. Also, the establishment of the Ex-offenders Association and the engagement of offenders in the Council.

The Tavua Town Council was awarded the Clean Small Town designation in 2015. This can be seen as boosting the recognition of the town. Inter-agency meeting on child abuse, neglect and abandonment with Government Officials and the Tavua Town Council also organised its first ever New Year Street Party. The Committee commends the work carried out by the Council and would like to recommend that it continues to promote community engagement to achieve a healthy environment and an efficient infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the current Members of the Standing Committee for their valuable input and support. I also extend my gratitude to the Chief Executive Officer and Management of the Tavua Town Council for their timely 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 that all honourable Members of this august Parliament take note of the Report.

(Report handed over to 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.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40. The Deputy Prime Minister may speak up for 20 minutes, after which I will invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Sustainable Tourism Framework

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and people of Fiji; thank you for the opportunity to make a Ministerial Statement on the National Sustainable Tourism Framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Sustainable Tourism Framework is a proposed 10 Year Strategy led by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. Essentially, what it intends to do is develop a shared vision for the Fiji Tourism Sector over the next decade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Coalition Government maintains, we believe in regional prosperity. Recently, the Pacific Tourism Leaders collectively committed to our ambition of a regional tourism sector that supports the wellbeing of Pacific peoples, our cultures and our island and ocean resources. Drawing inspiration from the Pacific and adopting global best practices to the Fiji context, Fiji is embracing principles that reinforce shared Pacific values to preserve the future of Pacific destinations for future generations of a Blue Pacific. Tourism, of course, plays a central role to this prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are taking a two-phase approach on the development of Fiji's Sustainable Tourism Framework. As I had shared earlier in this Parliament, a private sector led Steering Committee is closely overseeing and contributing to the development of the Framework because we do not want this to be just a Government vision. The Committee consists of key partners, such as the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association, Fiji Airways, Tourism Fiji, Duavata Sustainable Collective, Society of Fiji Travel Associates, Savusavu and Suncoast Tourism Associations, as well as key development partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the first phase, over the next 12 months, the Ministry, with the support of the International Finance Corporation, held a series of public private dialogues with over 600 people. This was mostly delivered virtually to include stakeholders outside Suva.

We covered topics such as private sector sustainability and greening, respectful and equitable

workplaces; tourism as a preferred employer; financial solutions for micro, small and medium enterprises; public infrastructure; sectoral linkages; product and experience development, growth of Airbnb; cruise market; and tourism entrepreneurship.

We have held focussed group discussions with key Government agencies on the visitor economy, conservation tourism, agri-tourism, culture, community-based tourism, et cetera, and we have more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also seeking the views of the broader public through an online survey and are inviting written submissions. Whether you are a Government industry, an NGO, academia, civil society, a student or essentially anyone, we want as many views as possible to call it a national framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these discussions, along with an assessment on the current status of the Fiji Tourism Sector, have resulted in several key priorities to be considered by the National Sustainable Tourism Framework and its accompanying three-year action plan. We want to ascertain where we are now, determining where we want to be, what the challenges are and where the opportunities lie.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on consultations in the first phase, what came out strongly was that tourism stakeholders collectively desire a future in which tourism:

- actively contributes to fulfilling career and quality employment;
- continues to add value to the local economy, including communities and the vulnerable;
- safeguards and promotes cultural heritage;
- encourages pro-quality investments;
- ensures equitable returns to indigenous communities; and
- plays its part in reducing carbon emissions and addressing climate and disaster risks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the future we want for tourism. Looking at the data from April to December 2022, visitors to Fiji contributed \$2.9 billion to the economy. The average visitor spent \$376 per night, compared to \$353 in 2019, and \$3,572 per trip up from \$3,379 in 2019. So, the demand for Fiji is high with visitors staying longer, spending and doing more, and we want to build on that. Because of this strong performance, we are now looking at an 8 percent economic growth this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to inform the next phase, which is the development of the Framework, we have synthesized various discussions from Phase A into a summary report. This report provides an overview of Phase A of the Framework development, including background research and outcomes from the first set of stakeholder consultations. It also captures the emerging priorities of the industry to be reflected in the Framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are about 11 key topics that are covered, looking at all the discussions we have had on:

1. Improving the policy and regulatory environment.
2. Embedding sustainability across all that we hope to achieve.
3. Visitor economy and its contribution to our national wellbeing.
4. Our different markets.
5. Our asset and experience - creating more diverse operations.
6. Having in place measurable Tourism Standards beyond economic indicators.
7. Financing on investments.
8. Workforce and skills required.

9. Environmental, social and cultural sustainability.
10. Enhancing risk management in tourism.
11. Monitoring and evaluation for sustainable tourism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are all critical areas that we want to build and add on to. The report has been shared with the Government Ministries to ensure policy alignment as a basis for further dialogue, because there will be more.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I always say that when tourism does well, so does the economy. So, this is an important piece of work that we hope to deliver in the coming months.

Over the next four weeks, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation will be conducting broader public and private consultations to inform the Framework. Once again, I urge everyone who is listening to contribute to this national strategy.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I thank you again for this opportunity to deliver my Ministerial Statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism. I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. F.S. KOYA.-Mr. Speaker, before I commence, I just want to remind honourable Bainivalu that the Opposition, my old school Natabua, put up a great fight on that. Please, do not forget that - it means a lot to Natabua.

Anyways, I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to respond to the Ministerial Statement. Mr. Speaker, this particular Framework was commenced in August 2022, and I am quite happy that consultations are actually continuing so that we can come up with a Framework proper, which is really post-Tourism 2021 Plan that was there earlier.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by the honourable Minister, this is a 10 Year Framework and it is actually a roadmap to revitalize and enhance our industry. There is a need for all of these, specifically also because the Gold Coast has moved post-COVID - Gold Coast because of the environmental concerns. Now, even more so with what is transpiring with Fukushima, we may need to also start thinking about what needs to be done but, yes, what may happen and what may not happen.

Mr. Speaker, there are quite a number of things that are part and parcel of this particular plan that the honourable Minister has mentioned which we are in total agreement with. One of the areas that also need to be seriously look at is the challenges that our Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) face within the industry and how we can always assist them because they form a critical component in the tourism industry.

The tourism industry, Mr. Speaker, is actually private sector driven. I am very happy to see that the honourable Minister is engaged with all the private sector and they are part and parcel of this particular plan, because that will take us a long way. He has mentioned about being a preferred employer, I think tourism is a preferred employer in any event in Fiji.

One of the things that we also have to look at is the growth of the Airbnb market in Fiji, which is massive. Currently, I think the Airbnb market is completely full, because hotel rooms are full, and this is actually an offshoot from the cruise ship market.

There are particular areas within the tourism industry that we sometimes forget and it is something that we can grow, and this is the wellness tourism. We offer such a huge wellness

programme at home, even locally and we do it to ourselves and this is an area of tourism that needs to grow and we need to invite investment in it.

Organic tourism is also something that is huge and the reason why I say that, Mr. Speaker, is that I happened to be in Madrid at the UNWTO Conference and there were some awards being given. There were two young gentlemen who had started an online booking which actually only deal with organic tourism and carbon neutral tourism, and they won awards for it. So, people now with the high spin that we are actually always looking at, are thinking, 'Alright, I want to take my kids to a carbon-neutral resort where I do not leave any carbon footprint'.

Honourable Minister of Finance, maybe, that is something that we need to look at with respect to providing incentives, so we invite these incentives to actually come up with these kinds of resorts. People do pay over and above the amount so that they do not, and they teach their children to leave a no carbon behind at the end of the day when they go on holiday and they spend quite a substantial amount of money, so these two guys actually won an award for it.

Things like that, we need to pay attention to, and I hope the honourable Minister is (and I am sure he is) regularly in touch with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with respect to guidance on this because they are the pillar of strength for all of us. The most important part is, this is a public-private dialogue (which is the most important thing) and as I have said, it covers not just the tourism operators, but our MSMEs, et cetera, are part of that as well.

Some of our MSMEs have great ideas and one of the most important things is, we must ensure that our tourism industry must continue to be built on the strength of an environmentally sustainable framework so that we leave a good tourism industry behind for our future generations.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Update on High Turnover of Teachers (Question No. 102/2023)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the number of teachers who have resigned in the first half of this year and what plans does the Ministry have to address the high turnover of its teaching staff?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this question comes in two prongs; one is relating to the statistical information that is required which I would like to give the answers to. The information that is extracted is from the Ministry of Education system which is known as the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) as of 8th September, 2023.

On the number of teachers who have resigned from January to June 2023, 80 percent of them have migrated for greener pastures and 20 percent have moved around to other job opportunities in the Pacific region and in Fiji. The total number of teachers who have resigned is 469, with one deemed to have resigned, and the breakdown is outlined in the table below.

Total number of teachers who have resigned					
2023	ECE	Primary	Secondary	Vocational (Deemed to have resigned)	Total
January	7	26	66	-	99
February	3	21	38	-	62
March	7	28	68	-	103
April	5	24	23	1	53
May	6	42	41	-	89
June	7	28	29	-	64
Total	35	169	265	1	470

On the second part of the question, Mr. Speaker Sir, to address the exodus of our teachers and the Ministry of Education in ensuring that teaching and learning environment for our students is not at any time compromised, the following strategies have been implemented to address the high turnover of teachers.

On the recruitment of new teachers for 2023: ECE – 96; Special School – 6; Primary School – 303; and Secondary Schools - 164. We have employed a total of 569 new graduates as of August 2023.

On re-engagement of retirees: Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Education has also re-engaged retirees from the age of 55 years as per the Ministry of Civil Service Guide. Re-engagement was done through expression of interest processes and for 2023, there were 38 Secondary School teachers who have retired in 2022 and 24 were re-engaged due to lack of teachers in specific areas, like Maths, Physics, Computer and Office Technology which honourable Premila Kumar who had initially wanted to remove from schools in 2022.

PEMAC Teachers and Industrial Arts: Retirees were re-engaged as even the new graduates do not meet the demand in this specialized area. The criteria for recruitment is based on merit and I had to ensure there is no nepotism entertained in this recruitment, unlike what the former head of HR at the Ministry, honourable Hem Chand, did last year when he recruited his own wife as the Head of School at Gurukul.

HON. H. CHAND.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Orders 62(1) on improper motive. He has mentioned that I have promoted my wife.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sit down!

MR. SPEAKER.- You may continue.

HON. H. CHAND.- May I continue?

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes. He is elaborating on his point of order.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker Sir, he has mentioned that I had promoted my wife - that is totally incorrect. He has to provide evidence, or he has to withdraw. For his information, I was not head of HR when my wife was promoted, she was promoted in 2019. I became head of HR in 2020.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- He has to provide evidence.

HON. H. CHAND.- He has to provide evidence.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was just clarifying that he was the head of HR. Were you not the head of HR before you joined politics?

MR. SPEAKER.- I am trying to divulge all that now in the space of time that is being allowed. At the same time, you have your differences. I have now asked the honourable Minister to continue because of the kind of statistics that you wanted.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Primary Schools - 80 teachers retired and 46 were re-engaged. For the nine ECE teachers who had retired, not one of them have expressed for re-engagement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another strategy that the Ministry of Education has used is the re-engagement of teachers who suffered termination due to the 'No Jab No Job policy'. There were 190 teachers who were terminated and 119 showed interest and have been re-engaged. From those 22 ECE teachers who were terminated, only five were re-engaged and there were 105 primary school teachers terminated. Sir, 63 have expressed interest to be re-engaged. With the secondary school teachers, 63 were terminated and 51 were re-engaged on the relaxation of the 'No Jab No Job' policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education has implemented the above strategies to address teacher shortage in our schools. We have already executed the plans to ensure that quality education in all our 176 Secondary Schools, 736 Primary Schools and more than 800 ECE Centres are not at any time compromised as we are committed to 'leaving no child behind'.

The Ministry of Education is currently working and discussing with local universities and training institutions on the alignment of subject combination on the intake of education programmes in line with the need in our schools as we are the biggest employers of graduates from universities in regards to the teaching profession. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the high turnover of teachers has created vacancies in ECE Centres, Special Schools, Primary Schools and also Secondary Schools. The increase in VAT, high cost of living, no increase in teachers' pay have contributed to the high turnover of teachers.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Nonsense!

HON. H. CHAND.- My question is, the number of secondary trained teachers teaching in primary schools has increased. What support is the Ministry providing or is planning to provide to secondary trained teachers teaching in primary schools so that teaching and learning is not compromised?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to our records, the number of secondary school graduates teaching in primary schools have reduced in numbers and we are working towards reducing the number of secondary school graduates teaching in primary schools.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I thank honourable Minister for that lengthy answer and I think he has learnt from his predecessor, Dr... Reddy on giving long and lengthy answers in Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, it is almost nine months now when the honourable Minister actually stated in this Parliament that he has actually initiated an investigation into appointments of Heads of Schools in December. Can the honourable Minister give an update on the outcome of that particular investigation and when is he going to present a report to Parliament? If he has found nothing out of that investigation, when is he going to appoint those Heads of Schools for whom the appointment was withheld by the honourable Minister?

MR. SPEAKER.- That sounds like a new question to me, honourable Maharaj.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was very interested in the turnover of teachers, in particular the number - 401. I would just like to get a grip on this, not just in terms of the numbers but I think it will be more compelling for me in terms of the trend. Is this an increase or is it stagnant or is it a decrease? If so, whatever the trend is happening, what sort of mitigation factors or mitigatory factors or adaptive factors are you trying to do in the Ministry to address that?

I know for a fact that the ratio of teachers to school children is quite large. I am also aware of the fact that when you have young teachers coming out, there are a lot of complaints about them. Some of them cannot even speak proper English when they are teaching English. So, I am interested in the trend and how you are adapting to the findings that you are finding from those trends.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Usamate, I do not really follow you on that. You wanted a grip on the data?

HON. J. USAMATE.- The trends, is it going up, is it going down and whatever you are learning from that and how you are adapting to it over the past few years or so?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, the information that I have is only for the last six months, but I can come back to the honourable Member if he could put those questions in writing.

The trend is inconsistent, it is not increasing. With the latest number, it has decreased as of June. If you want it from July, I can also provide that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am interested in the trend over the past few years.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Past few years, maybe the honourable Member can assist.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am asking you as the Minister.

Renovation Costs - Prime Minister's Residence
(Question No. 103/2023)

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament on the total cost of renovating the Prime Minister's residence at Muanikau?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the

question. The former Prime Minister and the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Voreqe Bainimarama, vacated the Government-owned residence at Muanikau Road on 10th February, 2023. He moved to another Government Quarters at Domain where he signed up to pay rent at the market rate.

We know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Mr. Bainimarama continued to occupy the Muanikau residence after the new Government was sworn in, in which used to be the official residence of the former Chief Justice. We were also informed that the former Prime Minister was also using the Ratu Sukuna Road residence for meetings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2017 and 2018, there was major refurbishment works undertaken at the Prime Minister's residence at Muanikau which was done through the Construction Implementation Unit which used to be in the Ministry of Economy. When we came into Government, it is now under the Public Service Commission.

The initial cost approved by the Government Tender Board was \$2,472,962. The contractor was Grace Road Food Company Limited. There were four variations that were approved by the Government Tender Board which increased the cost to \$3,053,773, with an increase of around \$581,000. In addition to that, the cost of the lead consultant - Maisuria Design Limited was around \$417,000. The total renovation cost comes to about \$3.5 million.

When the new Government came in, before the honourable Prime Minister moved into the residence, the Public Works Department had checked the residence at Ratu Sukuna Road and upon assessment, they had advised that they would need some renovations to ensure that the residence is fit for the Prime Minister, honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, to move in. The total cost was \$162,865 and the breakdown is as follows:

- (a) Minor maintenance works - \$33,000;
- (b) Sliding gate repair works - \$8,500;
- (c) Intense cleaning and servicing of kitchen and laundry appliances - \$580; and
- (d) Procurement of furniture and fixtures - \$120,785 (the biggest component of the \$162,000).

We were told that before the honourable Prime Minister moved in, the assessment was that there was no furniture. We were told that there was no register of furniture with the Government for the former Prime Minister. The assumption was that the furniture that was there was removed and was actually owned by the former Prime Minister. The cost of the new furniture for our honourable Prime Minister was \$120,000 and the total was \$162,000. That is the breakdown of the costs.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know what is the intention of the question. Are you going to investigate that renovation?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know what is his intention. All I am doing is answering a question by the honourable Member about the cost of renovation. The public deserves to know, and if there is a need for investigation, it will be done. In fact, if you look at the cost incurred at the former Chief Justice's residence, I do not think there was any big structural change.

Almost half a million dollars was paid to the lead consultant to redesign and if you look at the four variations and the total cost of \$3.5 million, it is a bit unusual to know. The furniture at the former Prime Minister's residence was not provided by Government, so I do not know what happened there. If the honourable Leader of the Opposition is interested to know what happened and if there is a need for investigation, it will be done.

MR. SPEAKER.- I do not think that the intent of the question by the honourable Assistant Minister was really to see that an investigation be undertaken. All he was seeking was raised in his question, just for information purpose.

Mitigation Plans to Alleviate Mass Resignation of Nurses
(Question No. 104/2023)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on mitigation plans to alleviate the mass resignation of nurses, especially the zone nurses who usually provide Primary Healthcare Awareness activities?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Ravunawa for that question. In terms of what the Ministry is doing on our mitigation plans to alleviate the mass resignation of nurses, it includes our retention strategy, and the strategies are increase in salary for registered nurses (Band F) according to years of experience. This results in the payment of scarce skills for those with more than 15 years of experience.

Another point is the introduction of the 8 percent retention allowance for all cadre of nurses and the re-introduction of consolidated allowance for nurses based at nursing stations. These will attract nurses to take up public health roles, especially for nursing stations in our rural areas and also relieving appointments should the need arise for zone nurses. Relievers are remunerated with subsistence and meal allowance accordingly.

As for the second part of the question, with regards to the zone nurses and serving in rural communities, nursing will revert to the one-year internship for newly graduates to allow availability of fully fledged nurses to fill up the vacant positions in public health. The Ministry is also focusing on the welfare of its officers (nurses) working in nursing stations and health centres. Some of their stations and quarters have been identified to have renovations done. Sir, we have seen that some of the facilities have not been renovated for some time, so we have allocated funds for that. Also, the engagement of retired nurses, especially nurses who are above 60 years old, most applicants are willing to do public health nursing.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the honourable Minister for the mitigation plan that has been read out in Parliament this morning. A reminder again that healthcare services is not only provided by nurses. Will the honourable Minister consider other cadre in the healthcare sector?

Also, I would like to raise that Section 39 of our Constitution states the right to health and for everyone to be cared for with quality and effective health services. The mitigation strategies read out for nurses is a noble one, will the honourable Minister also consider other cadre of the Ministry?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for that supplementary question. Yes, the Ministry is considering other cadre as well in terms of adequately remunerating them. That has been brought to Cabinet and also with the Ministry of Civil Service, that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is prioritised should any reform be taken.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am quite surprised this morning to know that 80 percent out of the 441 teachers have left the country. That shows zero confidence in this Government.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Rubbish!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the mitigation plans for the nurses, I would like to ask the honourable Minister for Health

MR. SPEAKER.- I think you have disturbed an hornet's nest.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Listen to the Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think with your earlier statement, you have stirred an hornet's nest. Please, go straight to your supplementary question, honourable Sharma.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Yes, Sir, I will go my question, thank you.

From the discussions of the Ministry with FNA in terms of the strike that was intending to happen, are there any outcomes of pay rise for the nurses in regards to mitigating the mass resignation of nurses?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I thank the honourable Member for that question. Yes, indeed, it is an ongoing discussion between the working group represented by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Ministry of Civil Service and stakeholders such as FNA. The points that I have raised in terms of budgetary allocation for the current one is based on their findings. It is an ongoing discussion between the working group on how best we can move forward with their needs - we are talking with them.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the honourable Minister, with this massive resignation of nurses, I think the honourable Minister is well aware that in most nursing stations and health centres, the pharmacy is managed by the nurses.

MR. SPEAKER.- Could you declare your interest here?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not in the public sector, so no interest at all.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Having said that, since the pharmacy's daily operations will be affected because the nurses are leaving, are there any plans with FNU to introduce pharmacy assistant courses so that these nurses can be replaced by pharmacy assistants graduating from FNU?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a new question but I will try and answer it. Whilst going around to most of the facilities, we noted that most public pharmacies are run by pharmacy assistants and there is a need for them in the public sector. We are talking with tertiary institutions if they can be provide some sort of learning platform.

MR. SPEAKER.- That was the third supplementary question. Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.37 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.15 a.m.

Work Programme on Solar Installation
(Question No. 105/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the work programme for the installation of solar around the country in this financial year?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. For the past 15 years, the Ministry has installed approximately 15,000 solar home systems to rural, remote and maritime areas of Fiji. These systems have provided essential lighting and support for electrical loads of up to 300 watts in size.

These systems have played a pivotal role in promoting economic and social development, particularly in sectors such as health, education, agriculture and commercial, benefitting the residents of these areas immensely. These solar systems have been strategically deployed in areas where extending the conventional electrical grid would be too expensive. There is a lot of demand, and the Department of Energy within the Ministry is working within its allocated budget to achieve as much as possible.

In the current financial year, the Government has allocated \$3 million for solar home systems. This funding will cover the supply and installation of approximately 1,000 Units. Currently, the necessary materials are undergoing procurement and the installation process will commence within the next two months, in addition to the ongoing installations, and will be completed towards the middle of next year.

The initiative underscores the ongoing commitment of Government to improve the lives of our citizens, even in the most remote areas of Fiji, while also contributing to the sustainable and eco-friendly energy solutions. The distributions are throughout the various Provinces, including Bua, Macuata, Caukadrove, Naitasiri, Serua, Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Lau, Navosa, Yasawa and Ba.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a question for the honourable Minister. In some areas in Caukadrove where I had visited a couple of months back, their systems start to break down again and getting bad. What is the Ministry doing about that in terms of the repair or servicing of these units? I know that if they are not going to be serviced or if minor repair works are not being done, those units will really get bad quickly.

HON. RO.F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, honourable Member, for that question. In terms of the systems, the ones being currently installed are different from the ones which were previously installed. So, those that were previously installed are now undergoing maintenance and that has been separately budgeted for.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, we understand that the solar initiative is a great initiative for the nation and it is very critical in terms of when you install it. Fiji faces unprecedented and adverse weather conditions. So, for a cyclone of high magnitude, what is the climate resilient and adaptive measures taken to cater for the unprecedented weather? It comes down to the first question. Are there any climate resilient angles or measures to this where the system is climate resilient?

It is not just about taking a system, having money for it and installing it. Is there any climate resilient or adaptative measures or technologies within the solar systems that are being installed in Fiji that can have a sustainability factor in terms of continuity? We need to be climate resilient with the technologies we implement, so my question is based on that.

MR. SPEAKER. - I now give the floor to the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is very much related to the question by honourable Rinesh Sharma. We thank Government for the continuation of the installation of the new ones but the one that I wanted to ask to the honourable Minister is on those that were damaged in the recent cyclones because there was a separate programme for those as well. I just wanted to know if that has been completed, or is it part of the programme that we are doing for this year?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU. - I was about to answer his question. But, anyway, looking at both questions on climate resilience, that is part of the whole concept of climate resilient infrastructure. So, for the solar infrastructure or systems that have been put in place, that is part of it, that when they install it, that it is also able to withstand certain categories of cyclones. I cannot give the technical details but that is what has been explained to me.

On those which were damaged, yes, as I have explained, that is part of the programme of our maintenance and repairs regarding the current solar to also cover those which were damaged because we had visited some villages and they had raised that. I have asked the Department to also incorporate that in the maintenance and repair programme for those which are needed as per our budget.

MR. SPEAKER. - That was the third question, but I will allow you to answer.

HON. J. USAMATE. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate the honourable Minister for continuing with the programme of solarisation. I know there have been a number of phases - Solar Phase 1, Solar Phase 2 and Phase 3, Sir, is the one that I am interested in where you have changed the system. Before, the solar used to belong to Government and you pay \$18 per month. I think we have now implemented a system where that solar is then fixed and handed over.

If the honourable Minister can just give us an update on how well that is progressing because once it is handed over, then you are liable for the repairs and the parts? If you can just give us a brief update on how that particular phase of the programme is going on now?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU. - Yes, that is the current programme, that we handover to the consumer. From the few villages that we have been to, we have done that and also signed the handover and also clearly explain to them their responsibility. That does not mean that the Ministry is just abandoning them, however, we are also closely liaising with the villagers and *Turaga-ni-Koro* on how we can assist them in that process. It has been well accepted at the village level on the ones which I have been directly engaged with and also with the Department of Energy.

MR. SPEAKER.- With that reply, honourable Minister, I think it would be sufficient for honourable Tuinaceva as well. Does he have to pay the \$80?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU. - No.

MR. SPEAKER.— Because now, we have heard from the former Minister that they used to pay \$80.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$18 per month.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- You are responsible for it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are you content with that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I will liaise with him on the specific locations.

Guaranteed Protection and Restitution –
Media Industry Development (Repeal) Act 2023
(Question No. 106/2023)

HON. A. BIA asked the Government, upon notice:

With the enactment of the Media Industry Development (Repeal) Act 2023 which also removed the Code of Conduct, Standards and Advertising Guidelines, can the Deputy Prime Minister and honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on the protection in place and the avenue for restitution?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Bia for his question. I guess the question probably reflects some of the fundamental differences between this side of Parliament and that side of Parliament.

When we say Media Industry Development Act 2010 or MIDA, it conjures up images of concern and repression. In fact, I would like to think that the removal of MIDA has been the cause of much celebration and exuberance that we currently experience in this country.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, absolutely!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- So, when I initially read the honourable Member's question, I was worried whether he was wanting to bring MIDA back because from this side of Parliament...

HON. K.K. LAL.- Just answer the question!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ...Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has gone into the dustbin of history and that is where it will remain.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, absolutely!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I will now answer honourable Bia's question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the repeal of the Media Industry Development Act 2010 on 14th April, 2023, does not mean that there is no longer a code of conduct for journalists in Fiji. Again, this is a fundamental difference between how we view democracy and how the other side of Parliament views democracy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have taken time to listen to our journalists and the industry, and it is clear that that the journalists and the media organisations understand their role in the society. The bottom line is, the repeal of the law was necessary to safeguard the media's independence, while ensuring the public's right to be informed accurately, fairly and timely.

If they had asked the Media Association at that time, they would have known this. In fact, a code of ethics was developed by the Fijian Media Association, and they believe it will be adhered to by media organisations and journalists in this country.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Where is the copy?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why the fundamental difference between us and them. We actually trust people to do the right thing.

It sets out ethical principles that journalists should uphold in their work. There are also international best practices and standards which we expect our media organisations and journalists to adhere to.

One of the most widely used code of ethics for journalists globally is the Society of Professional Journalist Code of Ethics. It sets out ethical principles that journalists uphold in their work, including truthfulness, accuracy and impartiality.

To be honest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the repeal of the Act so far, you can see the balance reporting that is going around...

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ... and sometimes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ...

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ...it actually favours the other side of Parliament, so they should be happy.

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

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for a very long time, Fiji did not have free media, a media that is essential for our functioning democracy.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- In fact, people say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ...

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ... that free media is the oxygen of democracy. But in the new Fiji, Sir, we have done it. That is how you preserve democracy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have laws in place, including laws on defamation, the right to privacy and the right to protect children. Alongside this, of course, we have the watchdogs.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Who?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The Consumer Council of Fiji and the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission which can receive complaints from the public on various matters, inclusive of those mentioned, particularly in terms of false advertising.

Section 78 of the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Act talks about false advertising. I urge you all to look it up - it addresses the concerns that have been raised in this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a nutshell, MIDA had to go, the whole of Fiji is happy with the removal of MIDA and now, we have real democracy arriving in Fiji.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. BIA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do understand and the whole of Fiji knows that the Media Industry Development Act has been repealed and now amended. But simply, the question that I had asked was, what avenues are there, at the moment, to protect or the protection avenues that are in place - avenues for restitution for journalists and reporters that are there because currently it is still in the process?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Nine months, it is still in the process.

HON. K.K. LAL.- What are you doing in nine months?

MR. SPEAKER.- I am at a loss here.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, try and go along with the supplementary question you have raised, especially on the restitution part. What are you trying to restore?

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the previous Media Industry Development Act, journalists are protected in terms of doing their work. This is in regards to mistakes, may be in writing or in reporting. There are laws that do protect them if there is a complaint from a third party in terms of stories being broadcasted or stories being written online. The question simply says, it is in the process at the moment, so what avenues are there to protect journalists and reporters since the Act is still in the process and finalising is in place?

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I am, kind of, trying to work out the right answer to say, Sir, but if it is for the protection of journalists, I think the law is there to protect them should there be concerns.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Which law?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The defamation law is there. I read defamation here in my reply. So, if that is what you are after, there is certainly avenues for journalists to use.

The other thing, Sir, that I did not put in here is just because it has not been formalised, is that there is also the Media Council that is about to be established. The holdup is really with some documentary requirements at the Office of the Registrar of Companies, which I am trying to assist with, but that will mean that the industry as a whole will be self-regulating.

That is true democracy, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They have actually selected the seven Council members who are very capable citizens of Fiji, and they are expected to act independently and adjudicate on issues of concern in terms of media. To be honest, I think there are adequate mechanisms in place. I know the other side of Parliament was obsessed with regulating everything, maybe because of one person who is no longer here. I can assure Parliament that by the time the Council is set up, there will be adequate mechanisms in place to address concerns around media conduct and the like.

Required Standards for Imported Food Items
(Question No. 107/2023)

HON. S. KIRAN asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on the measures that are in place to ensure that imported food items meet the required standard so as to avert the rising cases of Non-Communicable Diseases in the country?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Food and Safety Act 2003 and its subsidiary legislation, currently enforced by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, looks into matters promoting public health and safety. Also the Codex Alimentarius or Food Code is a collection of standards, guidelines and codes of practice adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and are referenced in the Food Safety Regulations of 2009.

Apart from this, the Department of National Trade Measurements and Standards, the Trade Standards and Quality Control Act of 2009, creates national standards for goods and services that basically provide technical requirements, for example, making a product, managing a process, delivering a service or supplying materials.

Furthermore, the Ministry has created standards in the areas of building and construction, communication and technology, consumer goods and management systems of trade management. Currently, the only standard related to food is the wheat standard - FS5-2003, fortification of flour, which sets out the requirements for calculation on minimum standards for wheat flour. This standard is also regulated by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

The existing measurement legislation or the National Trade and Management Act 1989 and its regulations, like the regulations on pre-packaged goods, deals with labelling requirements on certain food items. Under the National Trade Management legislation, importers and sellers of pre-packaged goods must ensure their packages are correctly labelled.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry continues to work closely with other core Government agencies, including the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, in ensuring that practical and proper measures are in place to protect the food industry and the consumers at large. We will continue to look at other sector standards, should industries or the Government need to adopt them in future.

As a way forward, possibly, the Government could consider having a food regulation system of its own but that, of course, will be subject to the Cabinet discussions but that is something that can

be done to improve the overall framework in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this system should cover topics ranging from safety, labelling, composition of food and handling requirements, and could be spearheaded by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. In fact, in Australia and New Zealand, they do have a joint corporative system that currently handles food regulations.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, listening to the honourable Minister, he is actually lost. He does not know what he is talking about - we are talking about imported food items, imported food items are actually self-regulated, honourable Minister. We do not have standards for imported food items.

The standards we have is mainly for the food that we are exporting out. We are protecting the consumers of other countries rather than the consumers of this country. Can you tell us how many food standards are there and how are these developed? Is your Ministry developing it, or is it the Ministry of Health and Medical Services or is Codex developing it?

In fact, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs had a meeting...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What is your question?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No, it is an important issue, we are talking about food.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What is your question?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am coming to that. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs had a meeting with health, trade and other stakeholders and we realised that there was no one actually controlling the standards of imported food coming into the country.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Stop grandstanding, what is your question?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, can you specifically tell us which agency is setting the standard for imported food and how is that being controlled?

Ask consumers, ask yourself when you go to these supermarkets, the kind of rubbish that is being sold in supermarkets. We are talking about standard, we are talking about quality, so where is the quality, honourable Minister?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that is a totally new question and so let me just put you at ease.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Oh! You have missed out

HON. J. USAMATE.- No answer.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You are the Minister.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Let me just put you at ease.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What were you doing for four years?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Firstly, sometimes when we say things, we need to think

that it reflects back on us.

(Laughter)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No, that is not it at all.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- So, after 16 years, what she is saying is that she has done absolutely nothing about food standards when she was in the Ministry.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- What are you doing?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- So, I will leave it at that Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think just to allay your concerns, it is a concern on this side of the Parliament and sadly, our Ministry. I have received a lot of reports on incorrect labelling, on food that is not of the right standard, particularly tinned fish. So, we are currently undertaking some investigation through the Consumer Council, as you know they do that work.

I have a few reports with me which most likely, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will have to do something or create an Act or develop some regulation around but what I would like to say Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that it is a concern on this side of Parliament and it has been worked on through the Consumer Council.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No standards that is why..

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- You are in government, what are you doing?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to remind us of a case of an imported tinned fish that was displayed in this august Parliament by honourable Qereqeretabua. That is an example of what they were trying to get through.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. The question asked was in regards to imported food and standards. So, my question is around sub-standards and I will formulate my question in this way. What is the regulatory mechanism taken by honourable Manoa, someone who has gone against fundamental differences and has shown unwavering support for foreign investors like Grace Roads? What safety standards are you taking for Fiji, not being a dumping ground for substandard goods?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will ignore the diatribe coming from that side but try and address the substance of their concern. As I have said, I received a lot of reports. I have to say that the Consumer Council of Fiji is doing a wonderful job in monitoring consumption in Fiji.

I receive regular reports and updates on every single issue in the country and one of the ones that is of active concern currently is the standard of food, particularly imported food items. We are working together to try and sort out what we need to do, going forward, so that is a concern.

Some of the imported goods that are coming in at the moment are in foreign language. No one knows what is coming into the country. I think this was coming in before we came into Government. It could not have just miraculously appeared in the last nine months, so let just keep that in mind if we are trying to throw stones at each other.

Rise in Criminal Activities by Teenagers
(Question No. 108/2023)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

With the rise in the number of teenagers found on our streets, loitering, glue sniffing and involved in criminal activities, can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration explain as to how section 8 of the Minor Offences Act 1971 be enforced to address these issues?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- I thank the honourable Member for his question which is essentially centred around section 8 of the Minor Offences Act 1971 and how we could use that to deal with loitering on our streets by our young street dwellers.

This section of the Act is designed to address situations where individuals including teenagers are found loitering in or near premises or in public places under circumstances that suggest illegal activity or prostitution. While it is essential to enforce this law, Mr. Speaker, we must do so within the framework of the Restore Blue concept which we are now endeavouring to use, which emphasises community oriented, policing accountability and rehabilitation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, section 8 of the Minor Offences Act 1971 provides law enforcement authorities with the legal means to address these issues. However, approach to enforcing this section is guided by several key principles and I just want to talk through them very briefly.

1. **Community Engagement:** Building strong ties between our Police Force and the local communities is crucial. We encourage residence to report incidents and concerns if it allows the Police to work collaboratively with the community to identify and address issued.
2. **Youth Centred Approach:** When dealing with teenagers involved in loitering potentially legal activities, we take a youth centred approach this means understanding their unique circumstances offering guidance and exploring alternatives to punitive measures whenever possible.
3. **Mental Health and Support Services:** Recognising that some of these teenagers maybe facing underlying mental health challenges. We are working to ensure that mental health services are available to them and accessible to those in need and early intervention and support are central to this strategy.
4. **Rehabilitation and Integration:** Our primary goal here is not simply to punish but to rehabilitate and reintegrate these teenagers into society as responsible and productive citizens. We must provide them with educational vocational recreational opportunities to redirect their lives positively.
5. **Collaboratory Efforts:** Collaboration with relevant Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and community groups is fundamental to this approach by pooling resources and expertise we can address the complex issues surrounding teenagers involved in such activities more reflectively.

Mr. Speaker, while enforcing this section as the question suggests over the minor offences in 1971, it has been part of our strategy but the focus goes beyond punitive measures. In the past, what the Fiji Police Force would essentially do is when the boats come around, they send a whole bunch

of Police Officers to gather these street kids and take them away until the boat leaves. Then they, obviously, will find their way back to town.

The whole idea here is to involve the community and that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to create a society where police officers work closely with the community, so that they can restore safety and hope, to the lives of these troubled teenagers, ultimately, the hope to break in the cycle of negative behaviours and offering them a brighter future.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a question to the honourable Minister regarding the glue sniffing problem. There was a report given by this Substance Abuse Advisory Council sometimes back about the level of glue sniffing amongst our children and our youth. I am just wondering if there is a plan to bring some law in place to try and control or regulate those who sell, buy and use glue, just to protect our young ones.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for that question. The short answer to that is, yes. I know it has been discussed in Cabinet and the Police are not the lead agency in that. The Ministry of Education with our Women and Children are the lead agencies looking after that with Social Welfare.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may just elaborate a little bit here. Interestingly enough, I was just talking to the honourable Minister for Education and he was pointing out elements of the question to me. Whilst the issue is dealing with children that are loitering on the streets, these issues are flourishing in our schools - children who come to school from home and go back home.

In teenagers, the age suggests the problem which means they are old enough now in doing things that they are doing. It is something that they have acquired over time where they are now producing the outcome of how they have been raised. I have always said, at the end of the day, you can talk about government and laws as much as we can, but when it comes to children and because of our laws and our Constitution, it gives that responsibility to parents.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not come here and talk about it because a lot of us do a lot of social work with you, and I am just dealing with the Catholic youth. This last weekend, there were 50 youth at my home living with me in Tailevu. These youth talk about these things – their problems and vulnerabilities. It seems societies are not listening to them. It seems as if parents are not listening, so they come down to the street and then the Police have to go and look after them.

I remember the issue that honourable Naupoto raised about stray animals. Our society has evolved down that path. I suggested this earlier – there needs to be some spiritual conversation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we are dealing with the lives of our children. We can do as much as raising programmes and supporting it with money, but these are really big fundamental issues.

I think with Government and the community together, this is what we are doing. I have got data and statistics here given to me by the Police in the West and Suva on the things that they do and putting them in schools, but these are not the solutions. I was going to read them out today, but they are not. They need empathy, love, care, understanding - these are the big things to deal with.

The problem is not only in the streets where they end up, but it breeds at homes and in schools. Until we deal with that and become responsible parents, these things will evolve. They will continue to stay, so I go back to my point earlier - these issues about the problems that we have to do with crime is a solution that needs to evolve from this Parliament, and I would like to initiate that in the future too, Mr. Speaker, Sir, hopefully very soon.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a comment to make. Young people are roaming our streets for various reasons – some for various reasons, some for their personal satisfaction, some are earning money for their families, some are there for love, for empathy and for good friendship that they do not find in their homes. I remember a few weeks ago, the honourable Minister for Women proposed the banning of pornography in Fiji. If it has to start from this Parliament, then we have to start now.

MR. SPEAKER.- May I add to that, honourable Members. I have come across cases in my village of certain delinquents who have been disowned, not so much by their parents, but by their respective *mataqalis*. So, if anything happens it is not the parent that is answerable, it is the *mataqali* from which that young child hails from. The *mataqali* has to answer at the village meeting - what are they doing about that because not only it has brought disrepute to the family but more importantly to the extended family. That is where the *vanua* comes in.

You have suggested, honourable Minister, that it begins from this Parliament. Yes, I would like to echo that perhaps, this could be taken on board to be discussed by the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) as they are meeting now. Whoever is going to take that from Parliament to that particular meeting with the Chiefs, we would like to be rest assured in this Parliament that it will be in their good hands to see that it is properly addressed. If you leave it only with the parents, then for sure the problem will still be there.

Yellow Ribbon is good, it is doing well, and I was part of the Yellow Ribbon since I was incarcerated in prison. Now, when we meet with the people who have been imprisoned, they call me ‘Old Boy’.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- I thought that should be referred only to people going to boarding schools like Queen Victoria School (QVS), Natabua High School, et cetera. Now, they tell me too that I am an Old Boy. But, again, you have rightly challenged Parliament, honourable Minister, actions need to be taken from here just like the Yellow Ribbon. This is for our young children that are roaming the streets.

I almost ran into some with my driver last night. They were sleeping below the bridge at Nabukalou. Probably, they were going across to take their night nap but the way they crossed the street, they do not care whether the vehicle was coming or what. Then I asked the driver, who are these kids? He said, “oh, these are the homeless ones that live below the bridge”.

I would like to extend what honourable Ravunawa has stated in his comment, that we need to take ownership of this. Honourable Members, perhaps you may want to discuss this further during your lunch breaks, try and get some things moving in a direction of getting the GCC to discuss this, this is very important. This is our future generation out on the streets now, not only for the GCC but for other interfaith as well. There are other ethnic groups that are involved as well in Fiji. Thank you.

MOU with YWAM Ships Aotearoa Limited
(Question No.109/2023)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry and the YWAM Ships Aotearoa

Limited?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Youth With A Mission (YWAM) Ships Aotearoa Limited is a New Zealand-based NGO that undertakes voluntary social services, including free medical services around New Zealand and some of the Pacific region. With the endorsement of Cabinet, an MOU was signed and activated on Monday, 7th August, 2023. The term of the MOU is 10 years which will allow the Ministry and the YWAM Ships Aotearoa Limited to work in collaboration in terms of delivering and achieving universal health coverage in hard-to-reach places in the maritime areas.

For the information of the honourable Members, the inaugural trip to Fiji by YWAM Ships was last year, 2022m, and this year, we made it official in terms of the MOU on how they will partner with the Ministry of Health in terms of delivering healthcare to our hard-to-reach places, especially in maritime areas.

Part of the agreement is the annual schedule plan, implement, monitor and evaluate health services provided in the best interest of the people of Fiji, and to notify the chance of potential conflicts of interest, which may impact on implementation and the outcome of the programme activity and equally manage and share information and public's findings in collaboration regarding the use of data from the projects.

For the make-up of the staff who come on board for this initiative, they are mostly volunteers and medical professionals as well and other professionals that come on board and assist the Ministry of Health and the country as a whole. Last year, they were in Rabi, this year they were in Kadavu and parts of the maritime areas in the Eastern Division.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me first thank the honourable Minister for Health for the update on the question that I raised yesterday. He is providing me with the Situation Report (SITREP) from the Ministry of Health, so I wish to acknowledge the honourable Minister. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for the good work.

My simple question is, we appreciate the assistance and, of course, the MOU (SDG-17 is on partnerships) and we need to continue to encourage this but a key area, particularly, learning from our past disasters is health assistance. I just want to ask the Minister, if assistance during disasters as well is part of the MOU or is included in the MOU?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can assure this Parliament that is also included in the response to disaster relief situation as and when appropriate.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the Minister whether this MOU has the endorsement or the covering of the New Zealand Government in your cooperation or MOU with the Youth With A Mission?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a New Zealand-based registered NGO, but so far it is endorsed by the Government in terms of the works they are doing.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- My question simply is, some of these arrangements are without the support of the National Government of the particular country and I am wondering whether there are provisions that we are aware of, that have the endorsement of the covering of the New Zealand Government? That is my question to the honourable Minister.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Sir, from what I have been told, since it is a New

Zealand-based registered NGO, we have met with the New Zealand Embassy and they do not fully need the endorsement for this matter, from what I have been told.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- *Vinaka*.

MR. SPEAKER.- That brings us to the end of the Oral Questions, honourable Members. We will now move on to the Written Questions.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order No. 74(1)(a). If we allow this question to go through, I believe there will be some breach in terms of procedures of the business of the Parliament because the question is nonsensical in nature, especially Question No. 110/2023(a).

We all know that Government does not organise any golf tournaments, so if that is factually incorrect, BNC would not make sense to the follow-up question. The question needs to be re-drafted and brought to Parliament at a later stage because Government does not organise golf tournaments.

We know the intention and we would like to get the answers to the questions as well, especially to part (b) and (c) of the question, but Government does not organise such tournament. Even this Government would not organise a golf tournament, so how can we ask this question in Parliament?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They were supporting the option.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Once again, we are just trying to correct the mistake by the Government in question. Please, rephrase it and bring it to Parliament.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Business Committee!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Business Committee!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We did not see that in the Business Committee. It is your question, you should have actually amended it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I think since we have taken it through the Business Committee. We will have to bear with it and raise the question now.

Written Questions

International Golf Tournaments (Question No. 110/2023)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) how many International Golf Tournaments have been organised by the Government in Fiji in the past;
- (b) how much money was involved in each Tournament; and
- (c) what were the economic benefits to the country, if any?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any ulterior motive for asking this question, it is just for the sake of information for the public and the taxpayers at large who are oblivious, not knowing at all about the background of hosting such tournaments in Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- You are adding to your written question, honourable Member.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order!

According to the Standing Orders, when you read the written question, you do not have to read the question. You just mention the number of the question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order! You were referring to which Standing Order?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 45(3): “If the question is a written question, the Member rises and asks the question by referring only to its number on the Order Paper”

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I know it is in the Standing Orders but precedence has been set in the previous Parliament. It is for the sake of the public. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I shall table my response at a later date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Cost of Ambulance Services
(Question No. 111/2023)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the amount spent on the Ministry’s Ambulance Services in the last six months for each Health Centre around the country?

¹ HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to table my written response to Question No. 111/2023.

Doctors, Nursing Staff and Allied Health Workers
(Question No. 112/2023)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services provide data on the resignation of Doctors, Nursing staff and Allied Health workers who resigned from the Ministry in the past six months?

² HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to table my written response to Written Question No. 112/2023.

¹ Editor’s Note: Reply to Written Question No. 111/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 112/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

Fijians Who Travelled Abroad – January 2023-August 2023
(Question No. 113/2023)

HON. S. KIRPAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration provide information on Fijians that went abroad from 1st January, 2023 to 31st August, 2023 in the following categories:

- (a) data on the number of Fijians that have migrated to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA from 1st January, 2023 to 31st August 2023 both, on skilled migration and on Visitor's Visa;
- (b) data on the number of Fijians who were on Visitor's Visa and have still not returned from 1st January, 2023 to 31st August 2023; and
- (c) data on the number of Fijians who went to a foreign country in each month from January to August 2023 under skilled migration?

³ HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to deliver my reply.

Projects and Programmes – 2023-2024 FRA Budget
(Question No. 114/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport provide the following-

- (a) a detailed breakdown of the list of projects and programmes that will be implemented by the Fiji Roads Authority Budget for 2023 to 2024; and
- (b) the targeted cost of each programme and project, together with planned completion dates?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3), even though this information is readily available at the Ministry.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice to move his motion.

HERITAGE BILL 2023

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

That the –

- (a) Heritage Bill 2023 be considered by Parliament without delay;

³ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 113/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure III.

- (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, 14th September, 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, Fiji became a party to the Convention concerning the protection of world, cultural and national heritage which was adopted in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference in 1972 on the 21st November, 1990.

Fiji, as a State party to the World Heritage Convention, is required under the World Heritage Convention to adopt legislative and administrative provisions to give effect to the World Heritage Convention. Therefore, the Heritage Bill 2023 provides for the domestic application of the World Heritage Convention in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to highlight at this point that in 2016, a Heritage Bill (Bill No. 10 of 2016) was introduced in Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. Although the Standing Committee then had begun its deliberations on the Bill, there was ultimately no enactment of any such law. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Bill lapsed.

In 2021, a Heritage Bill (Bill No. 3 of 2021) was tabled in Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Extensive consultations were held by the Standing Committee at various locations and communities at site level, Levuka World Heritage Site with various stakeholders in Levuka and at the national level with various government agencies and at the community level, with communities both in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Bill also lapsed.

It is evident that the intention to bring forth and pass a law specifically dedicated to advance Fiji's protection of national and world heritage site and places has been too long a journey. There is no excuse now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to further prolong something that will benefit Fiji, not only for ourselves in this present time and age, but also for our future generations.

Fiji being a state member of the World Heritage Convention is also obliged to conform to and implement the Convention and its operational guidelines. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I therefore recommend that it would be prudent for this august Parliament to urgently consider the Bill that is tabled before Parliament this morning.

There have been consultations with the Department of Heritage, Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Solicitor-General. If I may touch on some of the key aspects of the Bill. The Bill comprises of nine Parts and a Schedule as follows:

Part 1 is the Preliminary. Part 2 deals with the Fiji Heritage Council. Part 3 deals with Accounts and Finances. Part 4 deals with the Fiji Register. Part 5 with the Management of Potential World Heritage Place. Part 6 deals with World Heritage Listing. Part 7 deals with Funds for Fiji's Heritage. Part 8 deals with buffer zones. Part 9 deals with Miscellaneous. The Schedule is the Criteria for the Assessment of Outstanding Universal Value.

Clause 1 of the Bill provides for the short title and commencement. If passed by Parliament,

the amending legislation will come into force on a date appointed by the Minister by notice in the Gazette.

Clause 2 of the Bill provides the definition of the terms used throughout the Bill.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides that the objectives of the Bill are to provide for the recognition and management of places having potential and actual world heritage values, establish the Fiji Heritage Council, establish the Fiji Register, provide for the management and operating trust funds for places registered on the Fiji Register, implement Fiji's obligations under the World Heritage Convention and provide for other matters that are necessary for the administration of the new legislation.

Clause 4 of the Bill stipulates that the new legislation will bind the State.

Clause 5 of the Bill provides that the department responsible for heritage will administer the new legislation and perform all the functions assigned to it by or under the new legislation.

Clause 6 of the Bill provides for the establishment of the Council and the composition of the Council. The Council comprises 11 *ex-officio* members and four other members appointed by the Minister responsible for heritage. The four other members appointed by the Minister may hold office for a term of three years and are eligible for reappointment. The Council may invite a person of expert knowledge to its meetings. Moreover, the Director responsible for heritage is the secretary to the Council.

Clause 7 of the Bill provides for the principle that will guide the decisions and functions of the Council. The principles are based on Fiji's obligations under the World Heritage Convention and the Operation Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Clause 8 of the Bill outlines functions of the Council. The Council is to advise the Minister on matters regarding the recognition and management of places in Fiji having potential and actual world heritage values and Fiji's obligations under the World Heritage Convention. The Council may also, *inter alia*, develop policy direction to support Fiji's obligation under the World Heritage Convention.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 9 of the Bill outlines the procedures for meetings and the governance of the Council.

Clause 10 of the Bill provides for the disclosure of any direct or indirect interest by a member of the Council in relation to a matter which may be in conflict with his or her role as a member of the Council.

Clause 11 of the Bill prescribes the duties of the secretary to the Council. The Council may require the secretary to administer and facilitate the obligations of the Council under the Bill and to facilitate Fiji's obligations under the Bill.

Clause 12 of the Bill provides indemnity for any act done or meted in good faith by any member of the Council, the Department or public officers employed by the Council or the Department.

Clause 13 of the Bill provides for the different sources of funds for the Council.

Clause 14 of the Bill provides for the efficient and proper financial management of accounts

of the Council and that the auditing of the statement of accounts to be conducted by the Office of the Auditor-General. The certified statement of accounts must be submitted to the Minister and the Minister must present the same to Cabinet within 28 days of receiving the Office of the Auditor-General's report.

Clause 15 of the Bill provides that the Council is required to submit an annual report to the Minister and that on receipt of the annual report, the Minister must present the annual report to Cabinet.

Clause 16 of the Bill provides for the establishment of the Fiji Register of Potential World Heritage Places in Fiji. The Register lists successful nominations of potential World Heritage Places in Fiji that meets the criteria for nomination set by the Council.

Clause 17 of the Bill provides for the requirements and criteria set by the Council regarding any nomination by the public on whether place can become a potential World Heritage place in Fiji.

Clause 18 of the Bill provides for the process for determining a nomination for the Register.

Clause 19 of the Bill provides that the management of any potential World Heritage place must comply with the standard required by the Council and be undertaken by an approved management authority and according to its management plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill also has an Explanatory Note. I endorse the Bill before Parliament.

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.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of this august Parliament, as rightfully said by the honourable Attorney-General, that this Bill was first referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in 2016 and it lapsed and was re-introduced to this august Parliament and then referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights which I used to Chair. We had massive consultations around Fiji. We went to heritage sites, especially Levuka.

One of the reasons why it was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights because there were a lot of legalities that we had to actually go through before coming back with a report to this august Parliament. Unfortunately, at that point in time in the last term, due to the time lapse, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was not able to bring back a report to Parliament.

One thing that we need to recognize with this particular Bill is, we have to go through the process as defined by UNESCO to pass this particular Bill. One of the major issues that we actually faced when we went to Levuka was the buffer zone. There were buildings that were deteriorating and have been abolished because they were not able to fix it due to some restrictions that were put in place as it is now a World Heritage Site. There are a lot of issues that were faced by the people. Mr. Speaker, when this particular Bill becomes an Act would have one of the biggest Council with 17 members in it. On top of that, none of the members are taxpayers or ratepayers of Levuka.

These are some of recommendation that we were working on to bring before Parliament that this Bill needs to be amended. There are four particular departments that are looking after Heritage – the Department of Heritage under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Fiji National Trust, Fiji Heritage Council and Fiji Museum. This Bill does not define what are the different roles of these particular

four departments and agencies and they were actually overlapping each other. There was no clear cut indication to it.

Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that when we are talking about World Heritage Site, all other sites are just on the list, they are not World Heritage Sites, they are National Sites covered by National Trust or Department of Heritage. We are not dealing with humans with those sites, but when it comes to Levuka, we are dealing with humans, we are dealing with investments, we are dealing with businesspeople.

The initial building that was there for *Fiji Times* where the production started, because they were not able to refurbish that particular building, there is no longer a particular building and if this building goes in the form that it is, none of them will be able to renovate their buildings. I urge the Government to send this Bill to the Committee and complete the work that the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights started in 2019. There were issues like COVID when we were not able to consult, there was no interior motive about this.

I do understand the importance of bringing this Bill to Parliament because there is UNESCO funding. Unless and until we domesticate our treaties by bringing a particular domestic law, UNESCO will not release that funding. However, what we need to realise, that funding is not much. It will not fix the problem that people in Levuka are facing at the moment. The ratepayers are basically crying and they are requesting. When we were there, they requested us, “please, remove Levuka as a World Heritage Site.” That is the extent, Mr. Speaker.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We went for the consultation, honourable Attorney-General. Please, this is the time to listen because we are saying what the people of Levuka told us. At that point in time, honourable Bulitavu was also a Member of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Talking in contempt of the Attorney-General.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- That is what I am saying, it needs to go to the Committee. Unless and until I describe what is in the content, we will not understand why it needs to go to the Committee.

MR. SPEAKER.- The motion is on Standing Order 51.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes. That is what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, it needs to be sent to the Committee rather than having it passed over here because it will have a drastic effect on the people of Levuka.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Send it to the Committee, please.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- With those words, Mr. Speaker, I strongly recommend....

MR. SPEAKER.- We can discuss that when we address the substantive motion. That is what you are referring to now. The motion before us is on Standing Order 51.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am just explaining, Mr. Speaker, why it needs to be sent to....

MR. SPEAKER.- May I remind you, honourable Whip, the Parliament that we are in now is part of heritage. It is difficult for us here in this Parliament to ask for any extension or renovation

works to be undertaken because it is already listed. That is why we need a very clear demarcation of the roles of the Committee that you have said, plus the law. That is why we need to have this before the treaty.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We have already ratified the treaty, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is, all those things that you have just mentioned are not part of this Bill. As a previous Chairman, that is what I am saying, that this Bill needs to be amended to bring all those amendments before we can actually pass this Bill. That is all I am saying, Mr. Speaker.

Imagine as a Parliament, we face a lot of difficulties trying to do anything to this particular building. Think of what the people of Levuka are actually facing if they have to do renovation to their buildings. We have seen the condition of those buildings, Sir, it cannot go in the form that is presented at this point in time. It needs to be sent to the Committee to be reviewed and brought back to Parliament, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- But we should have discussed this at the Business Committee.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It was not discussed in the Business Committee.

MR. SPEAKER.- We never discussed it, so let us move on. Any other honourable Member would like to take the floor on Standing Order 51?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I think what we need to do is realise that this is not anything to do with politics, it is actually to do with Fiji.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Of course.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We are being facilitative here, honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Maharaj was the Chairman of that Committee, Sir. All he is saying is that by the use of Standing Order 51, we are circumventing/circumnavigating some things that are required for the Bill to be full and happy at the end of day. The people of Levuka need to be ensured that we protect them also. I understand also, Mr. Speaker, that there are certain requirements, et cetera that need to be met but it is not about politics here. We are just saying that the Bill had gone through two readings...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- ... and fair is fair. It needed after extensive consultations by the Committee and I also stand here as a current Member of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. We will do our utmost with the consent of my Chairman to try and ensure that it is done really quickly because we also want it done, Sir, but let us do it in a way that we cover all the basis and we do not have to keep coming back for an amendment on the Heritage Bill. That is all that is being asked, Sir, and I urge, please think about Fiji and think about our reputation about getting it right. We must get it legally correct and legally right, so we do so. What is paramount here, this is Levuka, you should know, Sir.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Of course.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This is to ensure that Levuka remains a UNESCO World Heritage Site. I am sure my Chair at the Committee will also say this, Sir, that we will do our utmost to try and get this expedited and finished as quickly as possible.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- *Vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give a brief contribution to the Bill under Standing Order 51. There is nothing urgent in the Bill. The Bill was about to go to third reading, it was in the Committee and it went back to the Ministry, given the advice by the Solicitor-General that the current form of the Bill, given some issues that came up during our discussion with the drafters at that time and one was the composition of the Council where people in Levuka wanted to be part of the Council.

The other issue was the penalties that came with those who breached if they wanted to renovate their buildings in Levuka - the penalties were too high. Those were some of the issues that came from the residents in Levuka, and that is why we had to go back to protect those in Levuka. But again, I will urge the honourable Attorney-General, given the dissolution of the last Parliament, the Bill lapsed but there is still pending work in the Committee.

I thought this particular Bill would have been reinstated when Parliament convened so that it could be referred to the Committee, at least for the next sitting. We will have to check the current form of what the honourable Attorney-General had tabled in Parliament today, with whatever work is pending, and bring it back to Parliament with the relevant report. The work that was done then plus the current changes that we have not seen but are in here to be tabled in together, so that Parliament would be in a better position to go into the third reading on this particular Bill before we pass.

There is nothing urgent here and we submit that this Bill be withdrawn and brought back with the right procedures, because we are just domesticating an international Treaty. It has a bearing in the next motion too on the International Fisheries one where you will need to do domestication. It also has bearing on one of the Bills that he had tabled under Standing Order 51, on the removal of the corruption jurisdiction of the High Court, which is also part of the domestication of an international Convention that Fiji had ratified. These are the domestic parts, and I would like to urge the honourable Attorney-General to look at this very carefully.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is just a request as the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Attorney-General might consider, that this be referred back to the Committee and brought back in another session, so that we can iron out the issues that have been brought up. It is just a request.

MR. SPEAKER.- They have put forward a request, honourable Member.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, we are listening from this side. For your information too, I was in Levuka for the last months, but let me correct something, there has been a lot of misinformation on this issue for the people in Levuka by the previous Government.

The first impression is this, that the whole of Ovalau is covered under heritage but no, it is not. Secondly, you can paint the town, but there is a process. You can dismantle, but there is a process. However, we agree that through ventilation of this Bill through the Committee, we want to see that it comes in a good shape and caters for all the inaccuracies that was there before. Therefore, we will withdraw the Bill under Standing Order 51.

(Withdrawal of Heritage Bill 2023)

MR. SPEAKER.- Finally, there is bipartisan. Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for lunch and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.39 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.48 p.m.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Political Parties Bipartisanship

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed with the Order Paper before us, I would just like to highlight a few things that have happened in this Sitting.

I would like to commend both sides of Parliament. It is historical for the Government to allow an urgent motion to be put forward. I have been sitting on the Opposition side for quite sometimes, even as Leader of the Opposition, and we tried so hard to get an urgent motion put through, but it was so difficult. The second thing happened before we took the break for lunch and that was when Government was willing to withdraw something put forward to be considered in Parliament, after pleadings from the Opposition.

Sir, this is an important week for you, a special day including that of the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, but this historic moment cannot pass without us making comments. As highlighted by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism on the issue of an urgent motion, we never saw the light of day on that one.

Secondly, as aptly put by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce in this august Parliament during one of the earlier sittings, it is now time for bipartisanship. That was echoed in the Business Committee last week by the honourable Opposition Whip when he also pleaded for bipartisanship. That word is quite difficult to try and carry out the true meaning of it because of the laws that exist, the Parliamentary rules that exist. Yes, in the past it was allowed, you can do cross-voting, you can cross the floor but that has all changed. The rules have changed. So many things can be done together - we all put our heads together and try and look for the best way out to help the people who have put us here.

That is all I want to say, because I am so proud to be part of these changes that we are seeing. I thank the Government of the day and the Opposition, especially the Leader of the Opposition, for all that has happened. All we just do is pray some more and harder - the best will always be there when we strive for it. Thank you, honourable Members for listening.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, before I move my motion, I just wish to share some comments and to reciprocate your kind comments about how we are carrying on in Parliament. As the saying goes, Sir, "Everything rises and falls with leadership", we believe Sir, under your able leadership as the Speaker of Parliament, we are able to foster this new bipartisanship that we are experiencing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 130(2) to (4) be suspended so as to allow the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice to move his motion on the approval of Treaties without referring them to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji played a pivotal role at the 12th Ministerial Conference last year in getting an Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS) through the World Trade Organization (WTO) acting as lead spokesperson for Pacific Group and the ACP. The Agreement is, however, only the first step in securing meaningful disciplines on fisheries subsidies.

Fiji is accordingly one of the proponents of the second wave of the negotiations that is currently taking place in the WTO. In order to maintain its role as a leadership and maximise its ability to influence negotiations, Fiji needs to show commitment to securing strong disciplines on fisheries subsidies through prompting, notifying its acceptance of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to the WTO members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so far, all the big subsidising nations have ratified the WTOAFS including China, the EU and the US. Fiji will, however, be the first Pacific WTO member to do so. In doing so, Fiji will be setting an example to the rest of the Pacific WTO members and to the rest of the WTO membership on the importance of disciplining harmful fisheries subsidies and maintaining healthy fish stocks.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has been the only Pacific Island country that was invited and joined the 14 member Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) for prosperity which was launched in May 2022. Negotiations commenced after the Ministers agreed to the scope in November last year and are proceeding with an extremely fast pace. In May this year, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Trade Ministers agreed and concluded one out of four pillars of IPEF called the Supply Chain Pillar. This was a remarkable achievement and as we will hear, the Agreement will be beneficial to Fiji in building resilient international supply chains.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the goal for IPEF members is to conclude negotiations on all the pillars by November 2023. The signing of all the pillars of the IPEF is expected to take place in November. Fiji being the only Pacific Island nation participating in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, needs to demonstrate commitment to the IPEF members to capitalise on the multifarious benefits that come within part of IPEF.

It is important that we demonstrate our commitment by ratifying the supply chain agreement to ensure that we remain on the path of concluding the negotiations on the rest of the three pillars and that is Trade, Clean Economy and Fair Economy by November 2023. Just to put clarity honourable Members, there has been precedence set before when the previous government moved in Parliament for the ratification of the Paris Agreement on 12th February, 2016 without referring it to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence because it needed some urgent attention on Fiji's part.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those pertinent issues and points in perspective, I urge all honourable Members to support this Suspension Motion to allow the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice to move his motions on the approval of the Treaties without referring them to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your very wise comments earlier on. I think what needs to be said also is that these two particular Treaties before us are not about politics but about Fiji, and we understand that. Right at the outset, let me say from our side that we have no objections to the motion before Parliament which is asking that Standing Order 130 (2) and (4) is suspended - we do not have a problem with that.

Sir, I would not go into the two particular Treaties now but when it is taken up by the honourable Attorney-General we will have a few words to say. But as I said earlier, Sir, in the spirit

of bipartisanship, this is about Fijians and Fiji's future and our future generations, we do not have a problem. I wholeheartedly agree with the suspension. Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I would like to thank you also for the comments that you made about the way we have conducted ourselves. I would just like to confirm that we are fully in agreement with this particular motion, but as the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament has said, there is a precedent because it was related to the Paris Agreement which was one of the most important ever agreements that we were involved in. Fiji was at the very heart of all the things that we were pushing for, especially for the Small Island States and the oceans agenda.

For issues like this where there was an urgent need for us to be able to push through things quickly, this side of Parliament is prepared to be able to use those fast-track options. There is a sensible argument that I was using earlier on in terms of the use of Standing Order 51 when there are adequate and important issues and there are some urgent things that need to be done, we will be prepared to look at and agreed with that.

In this particular issue that has happened, we will wholeheartedly agree with this motion of fast-tracking the process for getting these two treaties in line because they bring a lot of benefits to our country. It also keeps our role as well as the pre-eminent countries in other parts of the world. Also on that note, I notice that there is one other Convention that has been pushed through by the Committee - the Budapest Convention. This was the Convention on Cybercrime and the Committee had already gone through all the stages. It was tabled in the last Parliament Sitting with the recommendation that Fiji ratifies the Convention.

I think the honourable Attorney-General was to move a motion in Parliament that Fiji ratifies this, but a few months have passed, and we hope that the honourable Attorney-General and Government will look to moving that particular Convention through. So, those are the words that I have, Sir. We fully support the motion before us.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I think it is just left to me to thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Members on the other side of Parliament for coming together to agree as a Parliament, and as Members of Parliament, on the suspension motion so we can discuss the two Treaties before us, so I thank them.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RATIFICATION OF THE WTO AGREEMENT ON FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament approves that Fiji ratifies the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

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

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to move that Parliament approves that Fiji accedes to the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (WTOAFS).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, WTO which provides the framework for multilateral trading system has faced considerable pressure in providing a stable and predictable trading system in recent years. It has struggled to deliver tangible initiatives that would enhance international trade and reinvigorate a weak global economy.

The lack of agreement at the multilateral level in the WTO has led to a rapid growth in the number of bilateral or Regional Free Trade Agreement across the Globe and rising numbers of non-tariff barriers. Both these developments affect the ability of developing countries to integrate smoothly due to the global economy.

There is a bright spot in this rather desolate landscape. In 2022, one of the major successes of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) was that WTO Member States had agreed to conclude the negotiations on the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies after 21 years. This was only the second time the Ministers have agreed to formalize the Agreement since the founding of the WTO in 1995.

The Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS) is the first WTO agreement to environmental sustainability as its objectives and is a significant step towards ensuring the oceans sustainability. It will begin to tackle one of the key drivers of overfishing by curtailing harmful subsidies.

Fisheries Subsidies are payments made by nations to commercial fishing operators to keep those businesses profitable. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization 2022 State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, 35 percent of fish stocks worldwide are exploited beyond sustainable levels and over 90 percent are exploited at or beyond sustainable levels.

It is further noted that larger developing countries are paying USD22 billion a year in harmful subsidies that drive overfishing. These subsidies primarily go to industrial fishing fleets to artificially lower fuel and vessel construction cost while enabling them to catch more fish by fishing further outward sea and for longer periods of time.

Large amounts of fisheries subsidies are provided by large fishing nations such as China, Taiwan, Japan and the European Union. To their fishing industries, this include fuel support, vessel construction support and operational cost support. These subsidies enable the larger vessels, for example the larger purse seiners that are able to extract large amounts of fish out from their exclusive economic zone, the high seas or other countries EEZ.

In the Pacific, massive subsidies provided to distant water fishing fleets prevent the development of our own fisheries industries and utilization of our own resources.

Mr. Speaker Sir, fishing subsidies, if not disciplined, will contribute to over-fishing, including Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in our waters, thus leading to both environmental and economic harm and irreversible depletion of fish stock for the Pacific. The IUU fishing is a real challenge for the Pacific region.

In the 2021 Report by the Forum Fisheries Agency, estimated that between the period of 2017 and 2019, the estimated value of catching volume IUU fishing amounted to USD330 million. It is noteworthy that the Western and Central Pacific region have healthy tuna stocks and accounts for 54 percent of the global tuna catch. Therefore, it is vitally important that the region protects its resources for the current and future generations.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the AFS prohibits three types of subsidies, the first is the IUU fishing – Article 3. When a coastal State such as Fiji or Regional Fisheries Management Organisation or arrangement such as the Western and Central Fisheries Commission fight vessels guilty of IUU, this

article will require the subsidizing members to temporarily withdraw the subsidy from the vessel or operator.

The second type is the fishing of overfished stocks under Article 4. The Article prohibits all subsidies for fishing and fishing-related activities in the fishing zones recognises overfished. This is until measures are implemented to review the relevant fish stock. Overfish stock means a population of fish that is too low and cannot support a large amount of fishing.

The prohibition of granting or maintaining subsidies applies equally to domestic and foreign vessels fishing and overfish stock. It will also apply in all fisheries within Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) including small local fisheries, provide the area is deemed overfish. It is important to note that the Pacific has well-managed fish stock.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third type of subsidy is fishing in high regulated high seas (Article 5). This article prohibits subsidies for unregulated fishing and fishing-related activities on the high seas which are not under the jurisdiction of any coastal nation. This is fishing outside of the EEZ and outside the competence of any Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RMFO) such as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. The implementation of Articles 3 to 5 may require small legislative changes and modification of some existing subsidies.

The establishment of the WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism under Article 7 is an initiative that was announced at the conclusion of the agreement on fisheries subsidies offer some support to WTO members' efforts in implementing the Economic Framework Supply (EFS). More importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, members have a broad set of notification and transparency requirements under Article 8. The WTO recognises that the implementation of the partial agreement including its notification will post challenges for some developing countries.

Article 9 of the EFS contains provision that established a permanent committee on fisheries subsidies of the WTO and will oversee the overall implementation of the agreement. Article 10 further outlines that the EFS is subject to dispute settlement provisions of the WTO.

Furthermore, Article 12 contains the termination clause for the agreement. The EFS will become null and void after entering into force if no progress is made in the second wave negotiations within four years. What is the way forward for Fiji?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the EFS only partially delivers the mandate of SDG 14.6, that is, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies and MC12. It will nevertheless have a positive effect on the sustainability of marine fish.

Over the years, Fiji has been a strong advocate for international disciplines on fisheries subsidies in multiple international forum. The primary reasons for these position are:

1. To ensure that Fiji Fisheries Resources are sustainably fished and protect the oceans and its resources for future generations in the Pacific;
2. Fiji will be able to develop a domestic fishing industry rather than giving licence to foreign vessels to operate in our waters;
3. Fiji and the Pacific have not been able to compete with operators that receive massive subsidies from their home countries; and finally
4. Fiji will be able to get a better price of fish in the export market whilst the subsidies are removed.

Currently, the price of fish in export market is suppressed because of global subsidised fishing

activity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji played a pivotal role in steering the WTO members to reach agreement in June 2023 by galvanising the support not only from the Pacific but also leading the ACP bloc. Following the success of MC12, the WTO Secretariat members have pursued two separate but related workstreams. The first workstream relates to entry into force and implementation of the new partial agreement.

For the partial agreement to enter into force, two-thirds of the members must complete their internal processes such as ratification and deposit the Instruments of Acceptance with WTO. On entry into force, all WTO members who have ratified EFS will be under legal obligation to limit certain subsidies for fishing activity.

As of 17th August, 2023, 14 members have ratified. The majority of the distant water fishing nations and bigger subsidisers of fishing activity have ratified. These include Belize, Canada, China, European Union, Gabon, Iceland, Japan, Nigeria, Seychelles, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine and the United States.

The second workstream relates to the second wave of negotiations to which members agree to commence at the time the partial agreement was concluded. It was agreed that if partial agreements entered into force, the negotiations or the comprehensive agreement must be completed within four years. The WTO Secretariat and members have the aim to conclude that the second wave of negotiation by the 13th Ministerial Conference which will be held in February of next year.

The Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communication has obtained Cabinet endorsement for the tabling of the WTO AFS when Parliament is in session. The Ministry will continue to undertake a multi-sectoral approach in the follow up negotiation of the second wave and the implementation of the AFS. Even this, Mr. Speaker Sir, it is recommended that Fiji Parliament agree to the ratification of the WTO AFS and the deposit of Instrument of Acceptance to WTO.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I offer the floor since it is now open for debate on the motion, I would like to inform this august Parliament that I have a list here and for the Government side, we have the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications while speakers from the Opposition are honourable Koroilavesau and honourable Koya. So, we shall begin as usual with the Opposition. Therefore, I offer the floor to honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief in my contribution but at the outset, I would ask all Members of Parliament to support this motion. This is quite significant and very important for Fiji, in its role as the leading Pacific Island nation that all the Pacific Islands look towards to.

As you would remember, Mr. Speaker Sir, Fiji led the negotiation with the United States last year on the US Tuna Treaty. Fiji was able to negotiate the term of the funds that the US will give to the Pacific from \$21 million to \$60 million in a year. Also, we were able to achieve \$600 million for the next 10 years and this was seen as Fiji's leading role to master a strategy and negotiate with international communities.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this motion is very delicate and very important for the Pacific, not only for Fiji but if you look at other Pacific Island nations who are very tiny coral islands lying in the middle

of the ocean, their dependence on tuna and fisheries is huge. If you look at Tuvalu, their fisheries accommodate about 80 percent of the whole annual budget. If you look at Kiribati, about 80 percent of the annual budget is derived from fisheries.

For far too long, overseas companies all over the world have come to the Pacific and taken all the fish that belong to our nations without carrying out the normal process of giving them a fair return. The Treaty basically is a lifeline for smaller islands. Fiji is not very critical because it has other avenues it collects its revenue from and provides budget supplementary for its budget year. But for other island nations who look towards Fiji to be the mentor and the leader in spearheading the issues that are important to the island nations, I urge all honourable Members of Parliament to support the motion. The technical aspects, I think the honourable Attorney-General has highlighted the details.

Honourable Koya will contribute towards the negotiations he led at the WTO during his term when we negotiated the terms and conditions of this Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, before I take this opportunity to contribute to the motion before Parliament, I would like to thank my predecessor for his hard work in taking the Ministry of Fisheries to a level before I took Office.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to contribute to the motion that is before this august Chamber and I wish to extend my sincere gratitude.

Mr. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, could you just clarify that sentence that you have just said, you just began taking office this afternoon?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Sorry, Sir, yes, before.

Mr. SPEAKER.- I am sorry to be raising these kinds of issues because I will take every word that comes from you. Carry on now, honourable Minister.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Sir, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the honourable Minister, the Permanent Secretary for Trade and Senior Government Officials who have been involved in the ongoing negotiations in this space. The current negotiation on this is vital for further developing our nation's fisheries and ensuring sustainable practices are upheld.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to make the Ministry's position clear, that it does not encourage distant water fishing nations that are heavily subsidised and provide heavy presence fish stocks in the areas beyond the national jurisdiction. Distant water fishing nations are those engaged in overfishing, crowding out the market and as such, there is a drop in the market prices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry seeks the consideration of the following in the second wave of negotiations. A Small Island Developing State with development aspirations, our domestic fleet that are flagged in Fiji and fishing in our EEZ should be allowed to fish in the BBNJ high seas, provided we set precursor measures and practice, such as implementing a licence cap and limit on the total boats deployed. This removes the notion that we are a country that have first flown our flags of convince.

Our domestic fleet is challenged with high operational costs and more importantly, aged vessels, which is limiting them from accessing fish in high seas. It is, therefore, crucial that Parliament supports the ensuing finance facilities, subsidised at national level are provided to cushion this cost. As we are progressing in meeting our development aspirations in small island developing

States concept in the Pacific, it is different from what is adopted in the Caribbean and others.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry recognises the need to stand together during the negotiation process, but our desire must always be centred on developing our domestic fleet, noting there is only a small number of fleet and the national sourcing of subsidies is the variance.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry will continue to render its support to the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Micro Enterprises and Communications for the remaining negotiation. We, therefore, fully support the motion but for the ratification process.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to provide some input on the motion at hand.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, what everyone in Parliament must realise is how important this is to Fiji. As has been mentioned earlier on that in the history of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and I think its inception was in 1995, this is only a second occasion in which agreement has been reached. This is after day and night negotiations and so many things have happened over so many ministerial conferences, it was virtually destined for the dustheap again. We have been at loggerheads for many years to try and get this done, but we got it done.

What to me, Sir, as a Fijian is an extremely proud moment is that these negotiations and this Agreement at the forefront of it was led by Fiji and we managed to convince some of the other developing nations to do it. This is why it has actually been done in twofold.

This particular Agreement and I think it is good to hear it - the rest of Fiji, it will prohibit the subsidies that are given by the larger nations and those subsidies basically enables Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, fishing of overhead stocks and fishing of unmanaged stocks.

Mr. Speaker, just to put it into perspective, developed countries are actually paying about \$22 billion a year on subsidies that actually drive this overfishing. Please, remember something we actually spoke about before - we control some of the largest oceans, but we have always had the smallest voice. But we use that at the negotiations to say, "no more, it is not going to happen, we must have a say". We led a delegation, and we were asked to lead the talks in the Green Room on behalf of the Africans, the Caribbeans and us, as a Pacific, and we, as a nation, won this over.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these subsidies primarily go towards industrial fishing fleets that larger nations have, and it artificially lowers the fuel and other costs of these fleets to enable them to catch more fish further out to sea.

Mr. Speaker, if these subsidies are not disciplined, they will obviously contribute to this overfishing, and it is a huge problem including IUU fishing in our waters. Because we played such a pivotal role in this WTO to get this particular Agreement, we made sure that there was a hook left in, Sir, and there are two things that must happen. First of all, for this partial Agreement to enter into force, two-thirds of the members of the WTO must complete their internal processes, exactly what we are doing now. They must complete their internal processes, such as ratification. That is why it is imperative that we do it, this is about Fiji, Sir, and then we must deposit it into the Instrument of Acceptance.

On the entry into force of that particular Agreement, Sir, of which 41 members have actually ratified already, the other part kicks in - the clock starts ticking because we put a proviso in there. Remember this, Sir, we were being bullied by some of the larger nations. We put a clock in there that says the minute this thing is ratified, you have got the one-third, you have got four years within which to complete the rest of the Agreement, otherwise everything falls apart. That was the only

way we could actually get them to agree.

Mr. Speaker, this is a positive stand. As I have said, this is only the second time since the founding of WTO in 1995 that they have managed to come to some agreement. Fiji's fishing resources are sustainably fished, that is what we were after, so that the oceans and our resources are there for our future generations.

We will also, Mr. Speaker, be able to get a better price for our fish in the export market once the subsidies have been removed. Currently, the price with respect to fish in the export market is suppressed because of global subsidised fishing activities. This particular Agreement prohibits three things:

- IUU fishing;
- fishing of overfished stocks; and
- fishing on unregulated high seas.

A lot of negotiations have gone on and there has been tremendous amount of negotiations with the Ministry of Fisheries and our former Minister actually knows that too. A lot of hard work has gone into that and we have a fantastic team at both Ministries that we should take our hats off to for having done such a wonderful job. Those civil servants worked day and night to get this done without any sleep or any food, might I add, to continue and finish those negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, briefly again, there are no financial implications on this particular Treaty but, on the good side of it, we will get targeted assistance for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and also for developing nations in implementing the disciplines under the Agreement. We do get assistance for it. There is actually a WTO fisheries funding mechanism which will exist, and this was announced at the conclusion of the Agreement initially.

The way forward, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by the honourable Attorney-General is that we must do this as quickly as possible because we only have four years to negotiate. I am not sure if all of you know this, but the honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications will know that trade negotiators take a long time to get any agreement done. So, four years also, we purposefully put that four years in so that the bigger nations could not drag it along. Those that are giving subsidies could not drag it along for the next 20 years. It is very important that we start and get the clock ticking already on this.

We have been very strongly involved in it, as a matter of fact, we have led the Pacific on it. Pacific Island Countries are completely in support of what we have done, they appreciate all the assistance given by Fiji and the Pacific Island Forum also, with all of these.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from what I understand also from honourable Minister, the intention is to deposit this particular Acceptance in October 2023, again, this is another reason why we are in total agreement with getting it done as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, please, to all the honourable Members, this is something very historical for Fiji, it has never been done and I very proudly say this, that we were right in the leadership triangle with respect to getting this done at the helm of it and it is important that we complete it because I can tell you right now and I am sure the honourable Minister will tell you, Fiji's name at the WTO stands tall because of all of these.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am going to be very brief. I know the honourable Members on the other side have contributed very well in terms of laying out the reasons

behind the urgency for this Treaty to be ratified.

In my previous roles as the Professor of Economics and Advisor to trade negotiators in the Pacific, I have attended many long hours of WTO Ministerial Meetings, and the two most contentious issues on the table most of the time were fisheries subsidies and agricultural subsidies.

The Friends of Fish (FoFs), a group of countries which included Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Columbia, Iceland, Ecuador, Norway, Pakistan and USA, there have had these very strong arguments about the harmful impacts of subsidies on issues such as overfishing and depletion of fish stocks. Overfishing now leads to other negative externalities such as disruption in biodiversity and food chains. There are issues about economic efficiency, how large countries and those with large shipping fleets and better economies of scale were able to benefit more.

As honourable Koroilavesau said, it is absolutely important for Fiji and the Pacific, especially small island countries which rely on fisheries revenue, tuna revenue but also for countries like Fiji, our emphasis on small scale fisheries operators, particularly coastal fisheries and the need to protect our fisheries stock is always at the back of our minds and those who are concerned about sustainability of these resources over a longer period of time - the Concept of Global Commons, when we talk about fisheries subsidies because it sort of transcends beyond a particular region and a country. So, what happens in one part of the ocean or world can have an impact on other regions as well.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say that this is not a complete removal of subsidies generally, I think it is a partial agreement. As honourable Koya said, it goes a long way. In fact, it is historical - that there is some agreement for a long time, it looks like there was never going to be an agreement on removing these subsidies, like the agriculture subsidy.

Having said that, once this is ratified, again, it is a long process. We require two-thirds of the countries around the world to actually ratify this before it comes into effect. So, it is a long way and I think for Fiji, as has been said very clearly, it is very important that we, as a country, ratify this. Parliament and the bipartisan support that we are giving to this Treaty is significant because it is going to send a very, very clear message not only to the world, not only to WTO members, but also to our Pacific neighbours.

However, as the honourable Attorney-General and honourable Koya said, when you are looking at US\$22 billion in subsidies, those subsidies are actually used or they lead to illegal fishing, overfishing and depletion of stocks, which is very significant. It is not a small amount in the bigger scheme of things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are doing this, it is important for us, as a Government and as a Parliament, to look at our own national fisheries policies and regulations. I think it is an opportunity for us, as a country, to re-look at that and see where we are in terms of our coastal fisheries, the way in which coastal fisheries are exploited, whether we are getting the appropriate returns and how we can deal with it. These are important discussions that one or two have, going forward.

Mr. Speaker, as has been said, this is very important, and I lend my full support to the motion.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the contributors to the debate on the motion in front of us, which is the ratification of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

Before I begin, let me also thank you for your kind words when we began this afternoon. If you will recall in my Maiden Speech, I had specifically asked for the wisdom of Solomon in this

august Parliament and perhaps, the wisdom of Solomon is starting to move around in this Chamber in a big way, Sir.

In terms of the debate today or the motion in front of us in terms of the subsidies, I think we should give credit where credit is due and I would like, on behalf of this side of Parliament, to thank in particularly my predecessor to this post, the honourable Koya, and also honourable Koroilavesau for the tremendous work they did in Geneva last year in bringing about the historic Agreement. On behalf of this side of the Chamber, I would like to acknowledge their hard work and also the Government in actually bringing this forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I went to Geneva this year and worked out that we had to ratify WTO Instrument very quickly, as soon as I came back, I called the honourable Koya and said, “Hey, we need to get this sorted, can we do it on a bipartisan basis?” And so here we are, Sir, in this august Parliament, together as a people who are concerned about this country, ratifying this historic Agreement.

I will try and be brief, Sir, because I think honourable Koya has covered most of the pertinent issues to do with the Agreement but as we all agree, fisheries is something that permeates not only the Fiji society but the Pacific as a region. It is intertwined with our culture, our day to day living, our livelihood and our survival.

The Pacific, the Western and Central Pacific, accounts for more than half of the tuna stocks harvested in the world. Approximately, 60 percent of the stock is harvested from the EEZ of the Pacific countries. As custodians of the vast ocean, it is our job to ensure that we maintain the long-term sustainability of our resources, food security and the livelihoods of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has been a strong advocate for international disciplines on fisheries subsidies in the multiple international fora. The primary reasons for this position are:

- to ensure that Fiji’s fisheries resources are sustainably fished and protect the oceans and its resources, as the honourable Koya said, for future generations in the Pacific.
- Fiji will be able to develop a domestic fishing industry, correctly alluded to by honourable Professor Prasad.
- Rather than giving licences to foreign vessels to operate in our waters, Fiji and the Pacific have not been able to compete with the operators that are subsidised by their countries to operate at low operating costs in our waters.
- Fiji will be able to get a better price for fish in the export market once the subsidies are removed. Currently, the price of fish in export markets is suppressed because of the global subsidised fishing activity. In this regard, we need multilateral rules to support regional fisheries management efforts and contribute to the 2050 strategy for the Blue Continent which has been endorsed by the Pacific Leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement agreed to at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference or as we would like to call it MC12 as part of the Ministerial Outcomes was a historic achievement after 20 years of all talk and no agreement. It was an Agreement that Fiji had a major influence in, in delivering.

The current Agreement focuses on two disciplines, that is, subsidies to IUU Fishing and subsidies to overfished stock. It does not limit, at this stage, subsidies that contribute to overcapacity

and overfishing and does not provide special and differential treatment for developing countries such as Fiji. That is the purpose of the second wave of this Agreement that has been mentioned by honourable Koya. We also have within the Agreement a water-tight mandate to negotiate a comprehensive agreement or else the whole Agreement terminates in four years.

Fiji's ratification, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will demonstrate a strong commitment to the WTO membership and would provide the best pathway of leveraging the negotiations on delivery, comprehensive disciplines on subsidies, contributing to overfishing and overcapacity in the manner that meets the UN Sustainable Goals 14.6 or SDG 14.6.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it goes without saying that I personally support the motion before us in this august Parliament and this is truly a historic day for our country. We should all remember this day in the history of Fiji.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I, at this juncture, because of the commitment, dedication and passion of those who bid for us, acknowledge honourable Koya, honourable Koroilavesau and, of course, the previous Government. It is, indeed, a historic day for Fiji and for the Pacific Region and, I, therefore, endorse the motion before Parliament.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RATIFICATION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK SUPPLY CHAIN AGREEMENT

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament approves that Fiji signs and ratifies the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Supply Chain Agreement.

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

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I will provide some background, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) is a United States-led initiative that includes Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The IPEF represents 40 percent of the world's GDP and 60 percent of the world's population and more than a third of the world's trade. The IPEF comprises four pillars namely, Trade, Supply Chain, Clean economy, and Fair economy. The four IPEF pillars are independent on their own.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is the first Pacific Island nation and the 14th country to join the IPEF on 26th May, 2022. In accepting the invitation to become a founding member, Fiji saw that the US galvanised interest in enhancing sustainable development outcomes, peace and security in the region.

Cabinet Decision 48/2023 had endorsed Fiji's negotiating machinery at the IPEF negotiations and for the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Micro Enterprises and Communications to be responsible for coordinating all four pillars of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) with support from relevant Ministries and agencies.

The United States Trade Representative is leading the negotiation on trade pillar and the rest

of the pillars are being led by the US Department of Commerce. The IPEF Pillar 2 – Supply Chain Agreement, builds on from the ministerial statements which was agreed by the Ministers on 9th September, 2022 at Los Angeles, USA. The negotiations of Pillar 2 – Supply Chain was concluded after four rounds of negotiations and was further endorsed by the IPEF Ministers in Detroit, Michigan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Supply Chain Agreement has a total of 27 Articles and it outlines the objectives and goals that the IPEF partners aim to achieve in strengthening and securing the supply chain. The Agreement aims to build a collective understanding of significant supply chain risk with each partner identifying and monitoring its own critical sectors and key goods. It seeks to enhance crisis coordination and response during supply chain disruptions, ensuring the timely delivery of affected goods. Emphasis is also placed on benefitting workers and businesses, especially micro, small and medium sized enterprises by promptly addressing disruptions and promptly resilient robust and efficient supply chains.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the IPEF partners intend to prepare businesses to manage supply chain bottlenecks effectively, therefore, focusing on strengthening supply chain logistics and infrastructure. Additionally, the Agreement aims to foster cooperation, mobilise investment, promote regulatory transparency in sectors and goods, crucial for national security, public health and safety and economic stability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Agreement also emphasised the importance of respecting and promoting labour right in supply chains; recognising the vital role of workers in enhancing supply chain resilience. Efforts will be made to ensure that there are sufficient number of skilled workers in critical sectors and production of key goods through upskilling, reskilling, inclusivity and equal access.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Agreement also identifies opportunities for technical assistance and capacity building to strengthen the IPEF member supply chain. Lastly, the Agreement highlights adherence to market principles and minimising market distortions including unnecessary trade restrictions and protection of business confidential information.

Furthermore, the Agreement aims to strengthen IPEF supply chains to the establishment of three new IPEF supply chain bodies - the IPEF Supply Chain Council. The Council will foster collaborative effort among IPEF partners to develop sector specific action plans for critical sectors and key goods, and with the goal of enhancing supply chain resilience. The action plan will focus on diversifying sources, infrastructure and workforce development, improving logistics connectivity, facilitating business matching prompting joint research and development, and enhancing trade facilitation.

The second body is the IPEF Supply Chain Crisis Response Network. The Network is an emergency communication channel and will enable partners to seek support during supply chain disruptions and facilitate information sharing and collaboration amongst partners during crisis. The network's purpose is to enable a faster and more effective response that minimises negative impacts of the economies.

The IPEF Labour Rights Advisory Board, Mr. Speaker, Sir, comprises of government, worker and employee representatives, along with the sub-committee of government representatives which will support the IPEF partners promotion of labour rights in their supply chain. The Board will facilitate sustainable trade and investment and create opportunities for investment businesses that respect labour rights.

The Labour Rights Advisory Board also establishes sub-committees for addressing labour rights inconsistencies. The facility is operated by enterprises that are not micro-enterprises which are

located in the territory of one party but can affect supply chains in the economy of another party. A sub-committee will play a role in encouraging resolution efforts in providing technical assistance if needed. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sub-committee will maintain a public list of unresolved allegations which may be removed from the list if a resolution is reached or after being on the list for at least four years.

These bodies, Mr. Speaker Sir, as proposed by the IPEF Supply Chain Agreement, will play crucial roles in enhancing supply chain resilience, crisis response, and the promotion of labour rights in the IPEF partner economies. By fostering cooperation joint actions, the Agreement seeks to create a robust and sustainable supply chains that will benefit all participating economies in the Indo-Pacific region.

In alignment with the goals of the proposed IPEF Supply Chain Agreement, the United States has committed several initiatives to enhance supply chain, resilience and cooperation amongst the partners. The first is the training symposium. The United States will organise a series of trainings or symposiums focussing on supply chain, monitoring and operations. Experts from each market, will be invited to share best practices in cargo risk assessments and incident response planning, particularly for industries affected by natural disasters and cyber incidents. These efforts aim to help industries recover faster and improve the identification of supply chain bottlenecks and import dependencies.

The second one, Mr Speaker Sir, is the IPEF STEM Exchange Programme. The United States will launch a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Exchange Programme to connect early and mid-career professionals from IPEF countries with professional development opportunities in supply chain operations.

The third is a fact-finding mission. The Secretary of Commerce, Gina Raimondo, will join the President's Export Council on a fact-finding mission to select IPEF markets to explore potential collaboration and opportunities.

The fourth is the trade missions. The Department of Commerce will also lead up to ten trade missions to IPEF markets over the next five years focused on linking American exporters to opportunities in sectors for which IPEF Partners will increase diversification and resilience.

The fifth, Mr. Speaker Sir, is the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs). The United States aims to establish MRAs with IPEF Partners' Authorized Economic Operator Programmes that currently lack MRAs within the United States Customs Trade Partnership against Terrorism Programme (CTPAT). This move will promote similar and secured trade between IPEF partners and the United States.

The sixth, Mr. Speaker Sir, is the cooperation on digital shipping. The United States will allow its support for cooperation on digital shipping, including pilot projects with IPEF partners starting with the Port of Singapore. This initiative will enhance efficiency and modern shipping practices. A workshop for cyber-capacity building of ports has already been announced and we are obtaining nominations from FPCL and PFTL.

The seventh and the last one, Mr. Speaker, is the feasibility studies and reverse trade missions. The United States will initiate several new feasibility studies and reverse trade missions, which will bring experts from IPEF markets to the United States to meet with leading US exporters. This will support supply chain modernisation in IPEF markets. What is the way forward for Fiji?

The Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives, SMEs and Communications will coordinate with the

whole of government to undertake steps to ensure effective implementation and compliance with the Agreement such as to establish mechanisms, agencies, or departments responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Agreement. These entities will facilitate coordination, monitor progress, and address any challenges that may arise during the implementation process.

The Ministry will also ensure domestic alignment and streamlining of policies, laws and regulations. The Ministry will also engage in efforts to promote awareness and benefits of supply-chain agreement among other ministries, businesses, and other stakeholders. The Ministry will also participate in the agreement through institution bodies outlined in section 35 as stated above. The Ministry will also facilitate training and capacity building for relevant government officials, agencies and stakeholders to effectively implement the Agreement.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives, SMEs and Communication have obtained Cabinet endorsement for the tabling of the IPEF Supply-Chain Agreement when Parliament is in session. Given that, it is recommended that Fiji sign and ratify the IPEF Supply-Chain Agreement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I offer the floor for the debate on the motion, it is 4.00 p.m. and as usual, for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move her motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

Under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) be suspended 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, apart from the motion that is still before Parliament, we have two more motions to debate. So, allowing this extension of time, we can cover and complete those two motions.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER. - Honourable Members, we have three speakers that have been listed in the list that has been supplied by the honourable Whip. For the Government – the Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Manoa Kamikamica, and will be followed by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Economy. For the Opposition, it is honourable Koya. Shall we continue or do we take a break?

(Chorus of interjections)

There are two things I am hearing now (tea and continue). I think we will have a break. We will adjourn for afternoon tea before we resume.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.04 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.41 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE RATIFICATION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK SUPPLY CHAIN AGREEMENT

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again in the same vein as the earlier motion, this is a very important agreement for Fiji. It sets the foundation but may be historically extremely important. There are a lot of things that Fiji will benefit from with respect to this particular agreement. What must be realised, and as pointed out by the honourable Attorney-General, is that, this particular band or group of countries is about 40 percent of the GDP of the whole world.

What we, as a country, should put into perspective is that, Fiji is the only small country that is a founder member and to be invited to become the founder member on this particular economic framework is a massive achievement. We are in a phenomenal company of 14 different countries as mentioned: Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the US and Vietnam. It just goes to show how powerful we are in international forums to be invited to be at that particular table.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is before us is that we need to get ratification on this also and this is with respect to the prosperity and supply chain as part of the agreement. There has been finalisation of the legal scrub on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), for this prosperity and supply chain agreement. As we all know, this is actually a regional initiative that commenced in 2022, as mentioned by the honourable Attorney-General.

One of the basic things is that it promotes cooperation, stability, prosperity, development and peace within the actual region, but this is going to be the cornerstone for many things to come in many years to come. It is very important. This is one of the very reasons why I took the liberty when the honourable Minister for Trade first stepped into the office, I told him and I said, “Please make sure you do not take your foot off the gas on IPEF, it is an important tool for Fiji.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are intensive negotiations and discussions that have taken place with respect to this, and as I have said, now there are four different pillars on this when you are talking about trade, supply chains and clean and fair economy, et cetera. There are a lot of materials on this that people can read if they want to. But, once again, it is a hugely important tool.

It is this particular Supply Chain Agreement that is actually unprecedented with respect to our international effort and it is there to enhance our resilience, efficiency or productivity, sustainability, transparency and diversification all of those things. It actually aims to build a collective understanding of the supply chain risk.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must remember that we have just come out of COVID and we had a whole lot of things wrong that we were not able to deal with. So, as a country, we need to deal with that at that particular level and this is why this particular Agreement will aim to ensure that we foster cooperation, mobilise investments is another thing also transparency in sectors and goods crucial for national security and public health. We may just say these words but when you get down to the nitty-gritty, especially when it comes to public health, national security these are important issues and again also the promotion of labour rights, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is a whole lot attached to this particular Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Also for us, it identifies a lot of opportunities for technical assistance, some of which have already been made available. I might add, this is not just the assistance that is being offered and proffered to us, it is not just by way of government, it is private institutions. Some of the large, large companies out of the

United States are actually coming on board offering assistance to our MSMEs, offering assistance to our women. There is a lot that Fiji can benefit from with respect to this particular Agreement.

As mentioned by the honourable Attorney-General, this Agreement will also establish three new bodies and those three bodies are the Supply Chain Council, the Supply Chain Crisis Response Network and, again, I say this because we have just come out of COVID and great minds think alike and we are being considered as one of the great minds around the world by having a front and centre seat at these particular bodies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that also stands out is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Labour Rights Advisory Board which will be formed. Again, this is important, bearing in mind today's issues that need to be addressed with respect to levy. So for example they will be addressing labour rights inconsistencies at the facilities that are operated by enterprises that are not micro-enterprises but are located in the territory of one party when it can actually affect the supply chain of another country. So, you can see that they are leaving no stone unturned and once again Fiji is at the heart of these discussions and I take my hat off to the entire trade crew that has been heavily involved in this with hours and hours of laborious work that actually take place before it comes to us to get these things ratified.

With some of the goals Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the proposed Supply Chain Agreement, again, we are on a timeframe, we need to complete this, if I am correct honourable Minister, in November or late October. There are, as mentioned by honourable Attorney-General, trading symposiums that will be organised by the US and I must add here Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the US is at the forefront and is driving this at breakneck speed. I am sure honourable Minister has had sleepless nights already trying to get these things organised. They are driving this at breakneck speed to ensure that it comes to fruition and completion.

There is also something else that is of quite importance that is actually called IPEF STEM Exchange Programme. They are launching a science technology, engineering mathematics exchange programme. This is to be connected to early and mid-career professionals from IPEF countries and these are things that are important to us, it furthers our education, it makes us better.

As mentioned also by the United States Secretary for Commerce, Mrs Gina Raimondo, a very very high-powered woman who will also be part and parcel of the fact finding missions that need to happen with all around the IPF countries. So, you can see Mr. Speaker, Sir, that with respect to trade missions also, there will be trade missions that are coming in and out of Fiji. You can see that there is a lot that we will benefit from out of this.

Again, we go there not only to push our own position, it is also we are Pacific-minded when we do things, so we ensure that it is done properly so that all our Pacific Island neighbours stand to benefit out of this.

With the conclusion of the negotiations I understand, Mr. Speaker, describing as I said had been completed. The final text of the agreement has been prepared. They are simply waiting for us to ratify what needs to be done as a way forward to complete this agreement and get there.

Again, a very historical moment for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, and once its implemented, we stand to benefit with the numerous benefits and this historic international agreement that unites 14 very powerful nations around the world and across the Indo-Pacific region and basically so that we can focus on creating reliable and secure supply chains.

Again, all of these stem from the difficulties that we all faced post-COVID and a lot of

work is going on and I commend the team that had actually done so much work on it already having been part of this from day one. We wholeheartedly support this motion before Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I thank the honourable Koya for his contributions. The IPEF Agreement is let me say is unusual in a lot of respects and I will try and explain why very quickly.

Firstly, it has been targeted to be achieved in record type. Ordinarily economic cooperation or trade agreements can take five years sometimes 10 years. This has been done at breakneck speed. We signed as founding member in May last year in 2022 and the expectations are that by November, we would have completed all pillars if not substantively all three, with some sections left.

The second thing about this agreement, Sir, which I have noticed is not only the agreement is just about a government multilateral agreement between governments, it is actually trying to reach into the private sectors of each country and then attempting to connect them up as well.

So, from that perspective, it is a lot more deeper and a lot more powerful and that is why as you have noticed, there is already what we could consider early harvest benefits that were itemised quite in detail by the honourable Attorney-General and of course, spearheaded by the Secretary for Commerce to President Biden's Cabinet, Her Excellency Gina Raimondo. She is very committed to work with all parties too IPEF and particularly with Fiji to see how we can harvest the benefits.

Another point to share with the Members of this august Parliament is the level of assistance that has been already offered to try and put this together. As we know, a small country like ours is always constrained with resources, but we have certainly had assistance from some of our very close partners, New Zealand has assisted us, UN as well has assisted us as well as Australia that has a budget of \$20 million that will assist in building the necessary structures but to ensure that the IPEF once signed by the partners is brought into effect and embedded very well into Fiji.

If anything, Sir, the successful conclusion of the second pillar or the Supply Chain Agreement as mentioned by honourable Koya is a significant milestone for Fiji. It represents the strengthening of economic ties across the Indo Pacific Region to no less than 40 percent of global Gross Domestic Product.

The IPEF Supply Chain Agreement is designed to enable IPEF members to work together collaboratively to make supply chains for resilient, efficient, transparent, diversified, secure, including through information exchange, sharing of best practices, business matchmaking, collective response to disruptions and supporting labour rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this agreement facilitates co-operation amongst IPEF members and fosters an environment that promotes competitiveness while reducing costs for consumers. The Supply Chain Agreement, it goes without saying, holds tremendous potential for the IPEF region and particularly for Fiji.

Certainly, our Ministry is motivated to ensure that we extract maximum benefit from this transformative arrangement. A robust and resilient supply chain network will bolster our economy, help our people and build capacity to respond to unforeseen disruptions and challenges. The IPEF supply agreement reflects the spirit of collaboration and shared prosperity amongst IPEF members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the IPEF members have committed to various initiatives to enhance the supply chain resilience and cooperation amongst the IPEF region such as mentioned before - trainings, symposiums, trade missions, Pacific Focus Reverse Mission and STEM Exchange programme which will be a very great interest to the honourable Minister for Education.

The IPEF parties also aim to establish a mutual recognition arrangements, cooperation on digital shipping, feasibility studies, and among other endeavours. The IPEF Supply Chain Agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, represents a landmark achievement in our collective pursuit for economic prosperity and regional integration. In this regard, Fiji needs to demonstrate its commitment to IPEF members and capitalise on the multifarious benefits that come from being part of IPEF.

Before I sit down Mr. Speaker, Sir, a normal question has always been there. There are four pillars to the agreement, why are we signing only one? That has been collectively agreed by the parties and it is part of this unusual agreement that we are signing pillars individually, but that has been agreed amongst the parties on a multilateral basis. It is certainly not untoward in that manner.

Finally, honourable Koya also referred to legal scrubbing. We have been consulting the Solicitor-General's Office all the way, so in terms of the legal wording, rest assured that that has been taken care of as well.

With those few words Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the motion to the Parliament and with a great deal of enthusiasm, I look forward to the implementation of the IPEF arrangement for the betterment of the Fiji economy and its people. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me begin by thanking the honourable Attorney-General, honourable Koya and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications for their contribution and I thank the Opposition for their support to this motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Agreement on supply chain comes at a very important time. Post-COVID, we have both very strong and difficult challenges but also we see a lot of prospects domestically. We can feel the sense of freedom and sense of confidence, and I use the word "exuberance" at times, in what the people want to see and the prosperity for our country so, in a sense, this IPEF economic framework for prosperity comes at an opportune time.

We can see this in the broader geopolitical context, the Indo-Pacific Strategy, we can see this as a geoeconomic strategic interest and the fact that Fiji is part of this group which represents both, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications and honourable Koya pointed out that the group represents about 40 percent of GDP, as well as about 60 percent of the world's population. It does provide Fiji with a lot of opportunity.

The challenges we are facing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we can see, we have revised the economic growth forecast from 6 percent to a consecutive 8 percent for 2023 and that is a very, very positive sign. The tourism recovery, as was pointed out by honourable Gavoka, I think his leadership of the tourism industry right now has boosted that confidence in the post-COVID environment about the prospects of tourism in this country.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we faced a lot of challenges. In fact, in the last 18 months, we have lost about 10 percent of our labour force. This point, mentioned this as honourable Sharma said, in 2022, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not 2023, we lost 22,302 people from Fiji, of that 16, 967 went for employment and about 5,335 were basically immigrating.

It is a huge challenge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but on the other side we have some very, very positive signals. We are looking at our figures for July in terms of revenue collection, very strong, more than pre-COVID levels, forecast, we are looking at our August revenue collection with very, very strong

indications. Remittances, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been holding very strong in the first seven months. We had about \$708 million, the forecast for 2023 is about \$1.2 billion, it is relevant honourable Kumar I will tell you why it is relevant.

The investment lending, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been on a very strong trajectory, same with consumption spending and the labour market recovery, while sometimes you might say it is a good problem to have this challenge, the labour market growth has been very strong in terms of employment, wages, employees, employers and job advertisements. Any of the indicators that you look at is very strong. On the financial side, Mr. Speaker, we have healthy foreign reserve, liquidity is very good and as a result, interest rates are low and therefore investment spending is good.

The reason why I am saying all these, Mr. Speaker and honourable Kumar was speaking from the other side about relevance is the fact that the IPEF Agreement especially on global trade supply chains are very important because it brings multiple countries. It connects economies in a way that integrates, allows countries to benefit from each other and enhance international trade through better economic interdependence because there is an agreement to deal with these countries. It also provides some sort of economic power in the sense that if you are part of this group of countries, you are able to negotiate things better. It also means good diplomacy. More than that, Mr. Speaker, the timing of the agreement, the timing of this whole geopolitical get together and especially, focusing on trade issues and supply chain issues actually provides confidence.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The Framework?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Framework provides confidence to the investors and those looking at countries as part of that group. That is why it is also very important, she knows about trade but she is still making those side remarks. The agreement itself provides confidence.

She does not like the good news, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The good news is, the timing of the Agreement is good and it provides confidence to investors, to those looking at Fiji as a destination where people could come and invest. Of course, it also forces us as a country to look at our own ease of doing business, our regulations and our laws, and right now, we are engaged.

The honourable Minister for Trade and the whole Government, including the honourable Prime Minister is involved in making sure that we have a group. We have various committees now set up by the Public Service Commission, groups of Permanent Secretaries and Investment Committees. These are groups formed to facilitate, to ensure that we actually benefit from some of these Agreements. There is no point being part of a group if we do not provide the enabling environment in the country. So, in a sense, this allows us to also accelerate and make sure that we remove all the barriers and obstacles for investment. In that sense, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very important Agreement, and I am glad that the Opposition is giving us support for this motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the speakers for the meaningful interaction and debate in terms of moving Fiji to another level. It is a new Fiji. We are grateful that both parties can come and speak honestly and passionately about the subject that Fiji right now deserves to activate. I endorse this Agreement, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT AND
DISASTER MANAGEMENT 2016 -2017 AND 2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management for the reporting period 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018 Annual Report, which was tabled on 29th March, 2023.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management is responsible for the effective coordination and implementation of the development in Fiji's rural sector, in line with the national direction of the Government for rural and outer islands development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry aims to promote growth, reduce poverty and address rural to urban drift through the provision of basic social amenities and incentives for increasing incomes from farming and marine resources. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's role is to oversee the overall achievement of its vision which is a better Fiji for all through building the integrated rural development framework for productive, progressive, safe and resilient communities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 reporting periods, Fiji was still recovering from the widespread damage and destruction brought about by *TC Winston* which was estimated at \$2 billion. Despite the *TC Winston* recovery programmes and the many challenges encountered, the Ministry adjusted positively and continued to implement capital programmes assigned for rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry made a positive improvement in the 2017-2018 performance period with 89 percent budget utilisation compared to 76 percent in the 2016-2017 reporting period.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have a list of speakers who have been identified by the honourable Whips and we have three from the Government and three from the Opposition. For the Opposition, the honourable Leader of the Opposition will lead the batting followed by honourable Pillay and then honourable Usamate. For the Government, it is honourable Ditoka, honourable Kiran and then to be rounded off by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Manoa Kamikamica.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first, I need to acknowledge the Committee for this Report and I also wish to acknowledge the Ministry for the hard work that they continue to provide for Government and particularly for our people in the rural communities. This is not a Ministry that is, I can say, easy to work in, simply because of the role of looking after disaster as well as part of the services that it provides as highlighted in the Report - the recovery from *TC Winston* and of course the so many disasters that do strike the country. I will just go very quickly into the recommendations because there are a lot of speakers as well, Sir.

On housing, of course, this is an area that we need to look into, we need to provide the best facility for our people particularly those who live in the rural areas. I had highlighted yesterday in the meeting between the office of the Divisional Commissioners, this is one of the extra roles that they play in the Ministry but usually this is the responsibility of the Office and Accommodation Unit that used to be with the Public Service but of course was with CIU in the last few years. It is just the strengthening of the coordination and hopefully the allocation of the funding because the

Commissioners do look after the Government quarters and of course Government rented quarters as well to provide for people in the Divisions.

On Recommendation 4.3, Sir, I think there are two relocations that are mentioned in the Report - in Nabavatu and, of course, in Dreketi, Qamea. It is very unfortunate, Sir, but I hope that the Government can expedite this so that our people can be provided with the necessary facilities.

The Ministry only provides the initial arrangements because the other Ministries particularly in these particular cases, the role of the Ministry of Lands in ensuring the risk assessments are made and it is based on the recommendations that the delays were experienced because the Ministry of Rural Development cannot go ahead with the process of relocation once all the relocation criteria as set out in Fiji's Relocation Guidelines are met, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 4.5 is very important, the one on water. I would say and listening to the honourable Minister for Infrastructure yesterday, he did mention about the data but most of these data can be collected from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

There is a development unit within the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, and they work very closely with the Ministry of Rural Development because they do all the village profiles. I know that in the last few years we were quite behind in this, but we are thankful that through the payment of the *turaga ni koro* allowance, this is one of the key expectations out of the *turaga ni koro* and we hope that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs will update their village profiles so that we can do the necessary intervention particularly on water and sanitation.

This is important because I have read with interest the need to vaccinate the people in Vanua Levu because of typhoid because water projects are related to Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD) and therefore the coordination. That is why the role of the Ministry in the integrated Rural Development Framework is very critical, Sir, and I hope that all the agencies involved can look at their responsibilities within this and see if projects can be implemented.

Hotspots particularly, the Ministry of Health knows it very well. Hotspots are very much related to water and hygiene and therefore the close coordination between the ministries are so important.

I thank the Committee once again, Sir, and I know that other speakers will highlight a few areas as raised in the Report, but I do commend the Ministry and of course the Committee for the Report before Parliament.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this afternoon to contribute to the motion on the Review of the Ministry's Annual Report for 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

First, I want to thank the Committee for the wonderful work they have done and for everyone involved. I also like to give thanks where it is due to my predecessor, the honourable Leader of the Opposition now for all the work. The wonderful thing about this Report is that it provides some context to us in that we can look back and see where things started and how things happened.

In my recent travel to Lomaiviti, that has come very true for me as I linked things together with what I have read in the reports and what I have seen on the ground.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two years that were covered in the Report, witnessed as alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the devastating effects of *TC Winston*. It caused major destruction and despair but one wonderful thing about these kinds of difficulties that hit our nation,

it brings us together. It calls us to unite. I am sure many of us can think back and see how our young people who are going around saying “stronger than *TC Winston*”. That kind of united effort, I believe brings us together as a nation as something that we need to build upon going forward.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, another notable progress during this period was the relocation of Tukuraki Village in the interior of the province of Ba. Again, something that I have witnessed going around is the effect of deforestation and the unwise farming methods that has been practised in some parts of Fiji. We have seen, as alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, some of the effects around the nation in Qamea as well as in Dreketi and in other areas of Fiji. We see landslides happening because of the deforested ridge lines which is what the Ministry of Forests is advising us not to do.

Through careful planning and community engagement, the Tukuraki project was completed so we are very thankful to the previous administration for doing that. I am also delighted to inform this august Parliament that during the same period, another major achievement was the National Humanitarian Policy so again we are thankful for that. I wish to acknowledge members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for receiving senior members of the Ministry to clarify several issues that arose from the two annual reports before Parliament today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, amongst these issues were the maintenance of government quarters, the relocation of the Dreketi Health Centre and Dreketi Primary School, the upgrade of rural community roads, solutions to water problems faced by rural and maritime communities and the review of the National Disaster Management Act. In collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry is working very hard to help improve the conditions of Government pool quarters in need of repair. I am pleased to inform Parliament this afternoon Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Quarters Administration Policy has been finalised and will be submitted for Cabinet’s endorsement soon.

On the issue of relocation of the Dreketi Health Centre and Dreketi Primary School in Qamea, Cakaudrove, I can confirm that the Geotech surveys for the new relocation sites for both the school and the health centre have been completed. We are now awaiting construction of the new primary school and health centre which will be spearheaded by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the upgrade of rural community roads to assist in water cartage to areas affected by prolonged dry spells in Western Division, the Ministry works closely in partnership with Fiji Roads Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Sugar Industry, Fiji Sugar Corporation, Ministry of Forestry and Fiji Pine Limited to ensure a collaborative effort to address the challenges faced by these communities and improve accessibility.

Something that I would like to comment again Sir, and something that I have also observed is that in many of these maritime region, we have these big PWD depots lying idle and also in other rural areas of Fiji. It is something that we would like to use once again I suppose when the PWD comes online to help with the maintenance. I believe, as in the way that governments go, we experiment on some things that we think might work and I believe that doing away with those depots and the way that the FRA worked, did not work for us. That is something that the Ministry will need to review and work on once again, in collaboration with the Ministry of Works, to try and fix the rural roads and the dire need for repairs in many of the areas.

I have been to Gau; one half of the island has proper roads and one half of it does not have proper roads. I have heard from those that are on the island that before, those roads used to be well maintained when the PWD depot was in operation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry recognises that water is the basic need and it is also very right for every Fijian to have access to this basic necessity. The Ministry continues to consult with the Ministry of Infrastructure, Water Authority of Fiji and the Mineral Resources Department for permanent water solutions. The Water Authority of Fiji has scoped areas where reliable water sources have been identified. Additionally, the Ministry continues to cart to remote rural and maritime areas affected by dry spells.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, plans are also in place to consult with development partners, NGOs and relevant stakeholders to assist areas in the Eastern Division that are usually affected by water shortages. In the 2019 to 2020 financial year, the Ministry signed an MOU with Oceania Water Group for the hiring of its desalination plant to assist in emergency water cartage. Further the Ministry in partnership with UNDP is now assisting in the purchase and installation of desalination plants for maritime communities to assist in prolonged dry spells.

A classic example is the water project that we have in Ekubu Village in Vatulele where a desalination plant will be installed and powered by solar. This plant can convert about 3,000 litres of seawater into drinkable water within 24 hours. The project has now been piloted in Yakubu Village and would be replicated in other maritime communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry in partnership with Water Authority of Fiji implemented Ecological Purification Systems (EPS) in areas affected by prolonged dry spells and the absence of safe drinking water. We have installed EPS in the following areas:

- Dawasamu Primary School in Tailevu;
- Naqia Village in Tailevu;
- Naboutini Village in Serua;
- Wainilotulevu Village in Namosi;
- Tavuki Village in Kadavu;
- Natewa Village in Cakaudrove;
- Nagadoa Village in Bua;
- Nasovatava Village in Nadroga;
- Saioko Village in Ra;
- Wauosi Village in Navosa;
- Naiyaca Village in Nadarivatu;
- Nawairabe Village in Navosa;
- Waibasaga Village in Navosa;
- Beqa Yanuca Secondary School;
- Lutu Village, Wainibuka in Naitasiri;
- Naimasimasi Village in Serua;
- Nacavanadi Village in Gau; and
- Few others in Koro, Cakaudrove and Macuata.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the National Disaster Management Act, I am pleased to inform Parliament that the review process has been completed and the Draft Bill is now before the Office of the Solicitor-General for final vetting before tabling to Cabinet and Parliament.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure this august Parliament that the Ministry is committed to improving service delivery and facilitating economic growth through meaningful development programmes that are aimed at reducing poverty and improving livelihood.

On this note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to offer my full support on the motion before Parliament. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to make a contribution to the Report before Parliament. The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has reviewed the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management's Annual Reports 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

The Report highlights the Ministry's role in coordinating Government efforts during emergencies and in normal times, particularly in the aftermath of *TC Winston*. Despite challenges, the Ministry showed improvement in budget utilisation and continues to implement programmes for rural and maritime areas.

The reconstruction of the Dreketi Health Centre and Dreketi Primary School has already been alluded to by the honourable Minister and the project is completed. As for the relocation of the 18 homes in the red zone areas, the Ministry has stated that the relocation plan has been developed and is currently being implemented. The Ministry assured the Committee that all necessary measures have been taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the affected communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee enquired about the progress of the Rural Electrification Projects in the maritime areas. The Ministry informed the Committee that significant progress has been made in that regards with a total of 32 Rural Electrification Projects completed during the reporting time. These projects have benefitted numerous communities in the maritime areas, providing them with access to electricity for the first time.

The Ministry highlighted the challenges faced in implementing these projects including the difficult terrain and the logistical constraints. However, despite these challenges the Ministry remains committed to the electrification of rural and maritime areas and will continue to work towards achieving this goal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee raised concerns about the availability and accessibility of clean drinking water in rural and maritime areas. The Ministry informed us that they have implemented various water projects including the construction of rainwater harvesting system and the drilling of boreholes, however, there are still challenges in ensuring a sustainable water supply in some areas, particularly those during periods of drought.

The Committee recommends that the Ministry continue to prioritise water supply of projects and explore alternative solutions such as desalination plants to address the issue of water scarcity in rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also on that note, I would like to mention few points in regards to the Balevuto water project. I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Health and the honourable Minister for Infrastructure for the efforts put in now. I have been advised that water tanks have been placed in the five schools, that is, Nukuloa Primary, Nukuloa Secondary, Nacaci Hindu School, Naruku Primary and Balevuto Public, and Water Authority has moved in to fill in water from Waiwai Catchment. They have also positioned few water tanks in a few communities, but a lot of work is required in other communities.

Some of the schools are also providing bottled water or boiling the water to assist the students. Actually, the communities are afraid to drink the water from the catchment. I would urge the honourable Minister for Infrastructure together with the honourable Minister for Health to visit that area.

A lot of work has been done in that catchment area, there is a brand new treatment plant constructed and sitting there, but there is a drip treatment that is being done to the water that flows down to the communities - a bit of work is required and then the whole project will be completed. I look forward to the support from the honourable Ministers.

With those few words, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the discussion on this Report. Disasters are a fact of life in Fiji. This means that there needs to be a lot of preparation. We all know where the rivers that could flood are, and the slopes that could landslide and we have experienced cyclones from Category 1 to Category 5. Each village used to plan and develop their own disaster risk management where they knew how many elders, people living with disabilities, exits and evacuation centres were and how to use them, but unfortunately, this practice lapsed.

In 2016 when *TC Winston* struck Nayavutoka Village in Nakorotubu Ra, an elderly person and a person living with disability were trapped in their homes and died, as most members of the community ran to save their own lives, once the tidal wave covered the village. We found many similar incidents around the area as Category 5 *TC Winston* smashed the coastal communities.

Having a school at a distance, the community struggled without an evacuation centre and *TC Winston* showed us the urgent need for planning, evacuation and relief as many families struggled. Around this time of relief from *TC Winston*, cluster system was introduced. That was the first time I came across it and we discussed it with the consultant. This was different from DISMAC, which has now become NDMO. So former DISMAC was coordinated by the Divisional Commissioners who knew their geographical areas and knew their teams well on the ground.

With the cluster system, we saw a term of coordination from Suva with cluster leads from UN agencies or co-led by UN agencies. Their multiple assessment forms developed by different agencies. In one village I visited at that time in the interior of Ra, a *turaga ni koro* told us he had filled the forms from seven different agencies in one day. We also saw multiple agencies delivering various kits. With limited spaces in the tents, many families expressed frustration that through all forms they were filling they were getting the same kind of kits delivered to them and they had no space to keep it. We realised that this was a painful trial and error being done at a time when remote communities needed urgent assistance. I am sure we can only learn from it.

We also saw when clusters were bidding for funds in competition, we saw that the wash cluster raised more money generated for water and toilet systems than the housing cluster - when most of the homes in all those villages were completely destroyed. We visited a village where stand alone flush toilets were built and was not connected to sewerage or water system because this cluster was at work, while families were living in tents.

We saw economic project like gardening setup with no watering or backup system when villages set on the coast needed boats and fishing gear to kick start their economic life. These came through clusters and partners who did not understand our communities well enough. All these indicated to us that it is important whether there is a cluster coordination or DISMAC that on the ground, relief efforts should be coordinated through existing mechanisms that allow proper distribution of resources where need is.

Assessment should be done with one standardised form through local agencies on the ground and coordinated through DISMAC or with the current NDMO, to disseminate it to each cluster relief agency instead of the other way around. Government has its own machinery through Divisional Commissioners and they should be empowered to lead relief. Under the leadership of the honourable

Ditoka, we saw that has come back and floods were very well managed through Commissioners without and entourage of Ministers.

Various disasters have also shown urgency in positioning of stocks when there is a cyclone warning or flood warning because we know where the impact is expected. It is prudent to have stocks in place and can be mobilised for instant relief.

During the period of reporting, we saw after each disaster, there were two weeks of assessment and then relief but by then, many families started dealing with the shock. Food, water and dry goods distribution is crucial when people are in need. Clean water mobilisation takes time and sometimes, the clean water does not come for four to five days and that leads our people to drink dirty water leading to waterborne diseases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during disaster relief it is important that leadership and responders provide care and concern without biases. We have seen the entire Vitogo District suffer post *TC Evans* and *TC Winston*. Post *TC Evans*, relief materials were dropped and picked up again. There was any instruction by the then Government not to provide relief to all communities under the district of Vitogo. They were left to suffer because the leadership did not like the opinion of the late *Momo na Tui Vitogo*. We saw similar sentiments when we visited Vatulele Island to deliver roofing iron and other supplies post *TC Yasa* - we had to use *Uto ni Yalo* because the Government does not take relief materials.

Disaster is a time when all hands should be on deck and all partners led by Government should be responding to people most in need. There have been many lessons we can learn from to ensure that during the next disaster season, we are better prepared and better positioned to serve those in urgent need.

I support the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank you for your time.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity. Once again, I would like to thank the Committee. It is a dated report but nevertheless, I was not going to speak but I thought I would share a few things after all.

I will just talk about a few things that are in this particular report, in terms of the recommendations that we have, particularly item 4.4 which recommends that the Ministry work in partnership with the Fiji Roads Authority, Ministry of Agriculture and Fiji Sugar Corporation to upgrade rural community roads, this is something that is always needed especially out in the rural and maritime areas.

The Minister was talking about what he saw on the Island of Gau and the roads that goes up from Qarani to Nacavanadi is overgrown and that has been an issue. Looking at the status of roads – if you look at the roads around Gau and Koro, they are very different. If you look at the roads in Koro - the road that goes around the island and the road that crosses from Nasau down to Nabuna - these roads are well kept. But there is a very big difference in the number of vehicles you will see in Koro, compared to Gau. So, one problem that we have in a lot of outer islands is when you build roads and there is not enough vehicles, the roads tend to get overgrown very quickly, and that is what we see in Gau, Matuku and other areas.

Another problem that we also have in a lot of rural roads is the lack of access to good aggregates. If you see the roads that are being built in Kadavu and Ovalau, for a lot of them, the aggregates were coming across from Viti Levu. But what FRA has started to do is to look at quarries in each of these areas. If we go down to Gau close to the village of Vione, they are looking at a good

new rock quarry there that will address the needs for Gau. The same thing has been done in Koro, close to the village of Tuatua.

When you have these aggregates and you are working in tandem with the suppliers, you are able to fix the roads quickly. I think it is also important for us that when we are looking at keeping roads, we need to have enough vehicles on these roads. I think that is one of the major problems we have in Gau, even for the existing roads that you have, that is a particular problem. This concept of opening up quarries in all of these islands, in Kadavu we have opened up the Kiobo Quarry and the one in Yawe. So, having these aggregates around makes sure that you can have a good supply of material that will allow you to look after your roads.

There is one thing that I would like to highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in relation to Recommendation 4.5 about water and I am glad to see that the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs is here. If you look at what happened in Dreketi, Qamea Island where the landslide took place, straight after the village - the village is here, the sea is here, and immediately behind the slope, they have cut down all the trees in that area. They have begun to plant immediately behind the village and this is where the landslide took place. I think this is something we might need to consider in terms of looking at landslides, in terms of looking at the quality of the water, to have some sort of standards around those areas. That might be something we can look at in iTaukei Affairs.

But the other aspect is water catchment management. I think in Taveuni they talk about the blue line, is it? People are encroaching into these areas where if you cut too much of the trees or you change your agriculture practice, it is going to have an impact on your water, on the quality of water and the volume of water that we have.

I agree with the recommendations that are made here - boreholes, rainwater harvesting, self-help projects, water tanks, piped water, but it is also important to manage our water catchment areas well. Make sure that we have trees there. During afternoon tea, we were talking about when we used to drink water from the stream before, even if there are frogs there. You chase them and if the water is flowing, you can still drink that water because it is coming from a forest, the water is clean. So, I think this is also an important aspect that we need to manage well.

The last thing that I would like to mention, I congratulate the honourable Minister for bringing the National Disaster Management Act. Work has been going on for a long time and I hope that it gets passed. A lot of the issues that were brought up here by the Assistant Minister and the problems that are faced, I know that the NDMO has been working on that through the cluster system, to try to make sure that there is continuous improvements to the process that they use.

On that note, I would like to wish NDMO well as we are moving closer to the cyclone season once again, October/November. We will be having a lot of rain and we hope that all the lessons learnt will allow them to manage these disasters when they do happen so that we can look after the people in this country. Once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I endorse the recommendations in this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Usamate and thank you for highlighting to us the problems encountered in Gau. You have built roads, half of it is not used, so maybe the animals are using it. That was the problem with the airport they had in Vadravadra as well. The late Ratu Penaia Ganilau went there, and he was fronted by stray animals roaming around the aerodrome there. That became a problem as well but they do eat dogs in Gau so that is no problem there. I am just kidding in here because we have been sitting for long.

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to very briefly support the motion at hand in terms of the review of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 Annual Reports. I must admit that the Report is also outdated, Sir, however, firstly, as a key coordinating agency, we look forward to collaborating closely with the Ministry for Rural Development and Maritime as it continues to fulfil its role in leveraging the resources and engaging multi-stakeholder partnerships needed to expand its efforts towards building a more sustainable and economically diverse rural and maritime communities and economies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it goes without saying that the rural and maritime areas in Fiji constitute a significant portion of the country's total land area of over 90 percent, and over the past decade, important progress has been made but development gains have also been fragile, which are now undermined by new and emerging interconnected threats, including but not limited to climate change, economic and financial sustainability, the COVID-19 pandemic, unsustainable resource, to name a few. Bridging the development gap between rural and urban areas to a greater extent has never been so much of a cross-cutting issue than it is now.

In parallel to the table Report, I would like to acknowledge the hardworking efforts of the ground team and Divisional staff and Executive Management for their relief rehabilitation work that was aimed at the *TC Winston* of 2016 and 2017. Mr. Speaker, Sir, a collaborative effort on empowering sustainable local livelihoods should be emphasised in this case to address any national key priorities and thematic areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Trade and Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications has benefitted from partnering with the Ministry through the roll out of our MSME and Cooperative Development Programmes. They assist us in the implementation of the programmes whether it is in the form of distribution of application forms, applications we receive from them, and they are always ready to assist us. We have seen applicants that come through the Provincial Administrator or District Officers to us.

One of the other things, Sir, that we have attempted to do as a Ministry this year is try and encourage collaboration amongst all the Ministries, to ensure that we build a more cohesive approach, particularly when we move into the rural and maritime areas. I am pleased to note that we had our first multi-agency meeting earlier last month, and I look forward to continued collaboration in terms of trying to drive the rural and maritime economy.

Sir, before I conclude, I just wish to highlight something that is mentioned in the Standing Committee Report about incomplete projects, such as the refurbishment of Government quarters and the relocation of communities in the red zone. I know that the honourable Minister will fix up all these issues, given that they are legacy issues from the previous Government, to a large extent.

I hereby support the motion on the review of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Annual Reports which was tabled on 29th March, 2023.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I would like to thank all honourable Members that contributed to the motion before Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, noting the reporting periods of these Annual Reports, I would like to request the

Ministry concerned to fast-track and work on the submission of their other pending Annual Reports.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT – LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY 2014-2017 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the Land Transport Authority 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2016-2017 Annual Report which was tabled on 30th March of this year.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Land Transport Authority's core functions are to:

1. establish standards for registration and licensing of vehicles and drivers;
2. develop and implement effective and efficient enforcement strategies, consistent with road safety and the protection of the environment;
3. develop traffic management strategies in conjunction with relevant authorities to develop and improve customer service levels in all areas of operation; and
4. ensure equitable and affordable fare schedule for all Public Service Vehicles (PSV).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the year in review, the Committee noted the following achievements from the Land Transport Authority (LTA):

1. opening of the new Nausori LTA Office and the implementation of their Risk Management Strategies;
2. nationwide bus and fleet audit was conducted;
3. red light and speed cameras were installed at new sites;
4. Japan Vehicle Export Inspection Centre went live in 2016;
5. LTA introduced e-services; and
6. LTA Offices underwent upgrading and refurbishment works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee is yet to receive substantive response on the Standing Committee Report, according to Standing Order 121(6)(b), which requires the agency to provide a response within 21 days of receiving the report. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate of the motion. I have here before me a list of speakers that have been identified by the honourable Whips.

For the Opposition, we have four and for the Government, we have two. We will begin the first two speakers from the Opposition before we will give the floor to the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, and Transport and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics will round it off for Government. Honourable Hem Chand, the floor is yours, Sir.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to contribute to the Review Report of the Land Transport Authority 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Annual Report. The Committee Report provides a very comprehensive overview of the LTA's performance during this period, including its

achievements and areas for improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee identified several areas that need to be strengthened by the Authority including the need for a very comprehensive review of the LTA Act, the need for a more robust regulatory framework, the need for better coordination between the LTA and other government agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report notes that the LTA has made significant progress in the areas of road safety, customer service and infrastructure development. The year in review saw the opening of the new Nausori LTA office, Risk Management Strategies put into place and Go Green Project were successfully implemented. Nationwide bus and fleet audits were conducted, red light and speed cameras were installed at new sites. The Japan Vehicle Export Inspection Centre was established for the inspection of secondhand imported vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, e-services were introduced by LTA. The Committee's recommendations provide a roadmap for the LTA to improve its performance and better serve the people of Fiji. The Committee recommends that the LTA develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy that includes regular meetings with stakeholders, public consultations and the use of social media and other communication channels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report also highlights the need for LTA to work in collaboration with mobile service providers, private bus operators and the Ministry of Education.

The Committee's report is an important contribution to the ongoing efforts to improve the transport sector in Fiji and to ensure that it meets the needs of the people. The Report provides valuable insights into the LTA's performance and identifies areas for improvement.

The Committee's recommendations provide a roadmap for the LTA to improve its performance and better serves the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, with the collaboration work and initiatives conducted by LTA members of the public also at this time would like to state their disappointment with the road conditions around Fiji. For example, the Princess Road from Dilkusha to the road that leads to Sawani and ACS is in bad condition which we hope the Minister will look into it.

HON. K.K. LAL.- *Vinaka*, improve, improve.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those words, I support the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now offer the floor to honourable Tuinaceva because he does a lot of body language as well.

I had signalled to the honourable Whip whether there were four speakers so he could confirm, and he said, "yes, four," and then he went like this.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Probably to me, that means they will speak very short. Earlier on, Honourable Usamate was explaining something in the Chamber, and he did this.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- It is a sign that it was so small. Yes, very interesting, honourable Members.

(Laughter)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my contribution on the motion but firstly, let me thank the Committees, both the new and the old, for the preparation and presentation of this good Report. I realize that they have covered a lot of issues that are very sensitive to the public and also that touches the real core and the function of the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

Mr Speaker when you closely look into the Land Transport Authority's core function as stipulated under section 8 of the Land Transport Act 1998, which is also mentioned in this Report we will come to the fact that the 6 functions are rooted in one single word which is "Safety".

Mr Speaker Sir, I noted with interest the Committee's emphasis on the number of Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) issued during the period of review. The report shows an increase of 12 to 49 percent of TINs given between the year 2014, 2015 to 2016, I think that covers the early part of 2017 as well.

This TIN issuance is part of being a deterrent also used as indicators on the level of effort taken by enforcement officers to clamp down on the traffic offences on our roads as stated under section 86 and 92 of the Act.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the downside about TIN issuance is a reactive approach, what is disturbing is when we see an increase in TIN issuance but at the same time

For this year, there is a spike, an example, Mr Speaker, a report released by police on 3rd August this year 2023 stated a total of 25,960 TINs were issued for speeding offences only from the period 1st January to June 2023. Now, the distressing part is that during the period of heavy bookings, there were 56 deaths on our roads compared to 21 in the same period last year, which is about 170 percent increase. Mr. Speaker, for the whole of 2021, there were only 25 deaths on our road, in 2022 there were about 44 deaths but here we are in the first six months of this year, 56 deaths.

Mr. Speaker, common sense is telling us something is terribly wrong. Reflecting on these figures, I fully support the Committee's recommendation in item 4.1 that the institutions responsible for road safety namely the Fiji Police Force and the Land Transport Authority need to be more proactive, acting beyond words, beyond re-active press conferences, beyond post-accident articles and beyond responding to questions from reporters. We need to drive awareness in a consistent manner targeting key stakeholders, drivers, public service vehicles, operators, pedestrians and passengers with clear measurable outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, we need to dig deep, invest the funds, commit the manpower, enforce the laws, penalise, criminalise and consistently drive road safety awareness exponentially to critical mass so we are talking about road safety from the community level right up to all echelons of leadership and not sporadic awareness efforts from here and there.

Mr. Speaker, I also noted from the Report, the Committee's remarks for LTA to work in collaboration with various stakeholders to address challenges associated with e-ticketing. One of the e-ticketing objectives when the idea first came in 2011 was to save the 30 percent bus operators income that goes straight to the pocket of drivers. The understanding was that this 30 percent savings will enable bus companies to carry out fleetings especially purchasing of good buses to provide best and safe services for the people of Fiji. From 2017 when the system came into being until to-date, many challenges have been identified and I do support the Committee that a review to

address the challenges to convene immediately.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a few suggestions on some solutions LTA can take on board to assist in improving the e-ticketing service:

1. Top up agents accessibility - the lack of agencies in both urban and the rural has become a real problem and is one of the reasons it was hard for the travelling public to get card topped-up. They do have the right to travel, and every avenue must be available in a convenient manner to assist in topping up of e-cards. Whoever the service provider that will be contracted for this particular role should find solutions that can come in many facets to address this particular issue.
2. The connectivity - e-ticketing is internet driven, the lack of connectivity in some areas totally hinders the system and without internet, both administering the fare through e-card and top-up is impossible. If passengers are determined to travel, then their only option is to give cash to drivers.
3. The enforcement – in any law, without proper enforcement is useless. The LTA will need to devise new methods of enforcing the e-ticketing law in a more stringent, consistent manner but only after addressing the accessibility and the connectivity problems.
4. Tap in and the tap out concept - even if full accessibility and connectivity in the e-ticketing system, they still can tamper to benefit both the drivers and passengers illegally. With the current process, drivers can still manipulate the system and undercharge or overcharge fares, the motive is nothing else but to steal funds.

Mr. Speaker, my view on the top-up, will leave the system performance and will be able to correct some errors in the current system but must be put on trial on certain routes like the urban areas and the idea is get a feel of the system, correct the fails and put into full operation when everyone is happy about the system.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Report also highlighted the increase in the number of previously registered vehicles coming into our shores. The question on the standard and the integrity of those units since most of the vehicles estimated at around 60 percent coming into our shores are from Japan. In 2016 LTA signed an agreement with the Japan Export Vehicle Inspection Centre abbreviated (JEVIC) to carry out this offshore inspection to ensure that vehicles coming to our country (Fiji) are well checked and pass the standard accepted by the Land Transport Authority.

I want to say that the honourable Minister for lands who was Manager Legal at LTA that time was the one who devised all the policies and the regulations that are still being used by the Authority to check on these second-hand or used vehicle. The only sad part about this idea was when we were not able or that time to also apply the same rule into those vehicle coming from New Zealand, Australia and those coming from Singapore and Thailand which makes the young 40 percent of secondhand used vehicles that are coming into the country.

Japan is accredited with the ISO1720 to carry out the structural and undercarriage inspection, including the automated and stolen vehicle verifications and even the Euro 4 standard compliance check before their shift over to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, the objective is protecting our shores and markets from what is being known as junk vehicles from Elite that there has been illegally modified and the integrity has been compromised.

The Report has recommended a close collaboration between LTA and all bus companies to achieve a 100 percent compliance quality assurance maintenance system. The Quality Management System (QMS) within a set time, I do support the recommendation by the Committee.

Recently, we have watched and read reports on bus crashes, bus collision, bus fires, bus breakdowns, et cetera. Such incidents raises questions on the status of the Certificate of Fitness that are given to these buses. Mr. Speaker, the quality assurance maintenance system for heavy Public Service Vehicles is a rigorous inspection of all documentations related to bus companies, vehicle check and also the maintenance programme. It includes inspection of facilities and ensuring that bus operators maintain a daily check of all buses, a defect reporting register and a maintenance register.

Mr. Speaker, this quality assurance maintenance system inspection is also critical to around 60 bus companies operating in our country when renewing their road route licence which is about 188 (RL) granted for 10 years and allows a particular bus company to operate on the given route.

The implementation of the QMS means ensuring everyday safety conditions on buses, this particular scheme will give commuters great confidence in using this mode of transport.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of criticisms are levelled against the bus condition within the period of their Certificate of Fitness. People are pointing to poor bus conditions, once Certificate of Fitness in a bus is valid, these QMS reflects the visions of the LTA taking the Certificate of Fitness matter to another level whereby the focus is not only for that date of inspection where the Certificate of Fitness is given but maintaining the fitness condition of these buses 365 days.

In my view, LTA will need to monitor and to consistently carry out bus fleet audit to ensure the QMS compliance is at all time if they want the QMS programme to be more effective and meaningful. It is also noted from the Report the need for LTA to work closely with FRA in the construction of the road humps, zebra crossings, speed limit signages and other safety mechanisms especially at school zones. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 80 percent of deaths on our roads are caused by over speeding. It is a behavioral problem that is becoming a huge concern on our roads, and it is getting worse.

I mentioned earlier that close to 26,000 bookings for speeding offences only for the first six months of this year. That is how bad the speeding problem is on our roads. Speed limit alone will not do the job. Repeated offenders should be harshly penalised, fines should be severe and license to be suspended or cancelled for those continuing to disrespect the law, otherwise our road continues to be a killing field.

I am aware that the LTA is considering putting into full force the merit point system. I do commend the mover. We need to stop these drivers from over speeding and the number of deaths on our roads keep on increasing because of this speeding problem.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I thank the Committee for again bringing up the issue of traffic congestion in their Report. The negative impact of traffic congestion cannot be overstressed as it generates all sorts of problems, like air pollution, noise pollution, mental and emotional stress and economical loss.

Traffic congestion is a complex subject and it has to be looked at in a total picture. I want to say that there was a report prepared by the FRA titled, “Greater Suva Transportation Strategies” some years ago which was headed by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs. A great report, Sir, it had the views of some great engineers in the region. They identified great ideas which we can use to solve and address the congestion problems on our roads. The ideas like the dedicated bus lanes, linked

traffic signals, improve the bus terminals, intersection upgrades and carpooling as the solution for traffic during peak hours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, I thank the Committee for their great work, and I support the motion.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Opposition Members for their contribution. Because we are the largest party here in this Parliament, we will have a lot of speakers from this side. Unfortunately, there are three small parties on the other side, so I can imagine the amount of speech they will make.

Today, I stand before you to support the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs regarding the review of the Land Transport Authority for the years 2014 to 2017. This Report shed light on the crucial aspects of our transportation system and provides invariable insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. I must commend the Standing Committee for its diligent work in scrutinising the LTA's activities during this period. Their efforts have enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing our transportation sector and have laid the foundation for a meaningful change.

One of the key findings of this Report that warrants our attention is the significant increase in Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) issued and vehicles seized between 2014 and 2017. Whilst some may argue that this reflects a heavy-handed approach, we must recognise that this surge is primarily due to the expanding vehicle population on our roads. With more vehicles comes with greater responsibility to ensure road safety.

The LTA in collaboration with the Fiji Police Force has been conducting more random checks and enforcement operations to maintain order on our roads. This is a necessary step to protect the lives of our citizens. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the road conditions in our country are deteriorating rapidly. Our infrastructure is crumbling and yet the Land Transport Authority continues to charge vehicle drivers for road levies. This is a matter of grave concern.

How can we justify collecting these levies when the very roads they are intended to maintain are in such a dire state? I urge the honourable Minister responsible for transportation and I think the same Minister is responsible for roads as well to take immediate action. It is not enough to charge our citizens for road levies without ensuring that their hard-earned money is invested in road maintenance and improvements. We must address these issues urgently and allocate the necessary funds to repair and upgrade our road infrastructure.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been distressing reports of misconduct by LTA officers during road inspections. Such behaviour not only tarnishes the reputation of the LTA but also erodes the trust of the public. We need transparency and accountability in the actions of our enforcement officers. The Minister must step up to ensure that officers are held accountable for their actions and that proper training and oversight are in place to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we applaud the LTA for its effort to improve the road safety and transportation services in Fiji, there are pressing issues that demand our attention. We must prioritise the maintenance of our roads as highlighted by honourable Hem Chand, the roads that leads to Sawani, Muaniweni and these areas, I had the opportunity to personally visit these areas and the road condition is pathetic.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Where in Naitasiri?

HON. K.K. LAL.- If you had listened to me a while ago you would have heard - Muaniweni, Sawani and Viria. If you want, I can give you a tour, do not worry.

(Laughter)

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must also hold our LTA officers accountable for their conduct and ensure that such implementation of initiatives like the e-ticketing system as well. I call upon all Members of Parliament to support the Report before us.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion in front of us regarding the LTA Annual Report 2014-2017. As noted, it is quite dated, there are quite a few issues raised there including the improvements. There is emphasis on road safety which is acknowledged. Unfortunately, there used to be a National Road Safety Council, and this had been done away with by the last government.

So, again this is one of the areas which we need to improve on as we move forward. There are various issues regarding collaboration. There is a qualified audit opinion which has been mentioned there and LTA is taking the necessary processes. There have been assurance given, also given the dated Annual Reports, when I came into the Ministry that is one of the big weaknesses in terms of monitoring and evaluation and reporting within the Ministry.

Again, this is an inheritance from the last government which we will need to rectify and work on. That not only includes the reporting from within the Ministry but also the agencies like LTA. So, if we have had efficient, effective monitoring systems from the previous administration then we might not have been in this situation.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- *Vakarorogo mada.*

HON. K.K. LAL.- Big issue on potholes, pot holes.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- There is also an issue on Japan Export Vehicle Inspection Centre, that is a very significant and good development as explained by honourable Tuinaceva who is very knowledgeable in the industry as a former CEO and also he is a transport engineer, I believe. I acknowledge the assistance and the exchange we always have which is very critical as we move forward.

E-ticketing has been mentioned, and there is a joint committee under the Minister of Communications working on that and we should be working towards a solution. I understand the various challenges faced with e-ticketing. I mentioned road safety awareness but I do not want to repeat that.

There are various complex legislations in the LTA Act and the regulations, et cetera. All this is currently being looked at, but it cannot be looked at in isolation - it needs to be looked at holistically. People can still sell their permits and this is one of the major issues that we are looking at reviewing and some permits have been sold for up to nearly \$100,000. It has become an industry in itself and again that is an issue which continues to breed unethical practices.

Honourable Ketan Lal has specifically asked me to step up – yes, we are stepping up. The taxi lottery that was a methodology for distributing taxi permits which was just a joke. That is something we are working on fixing. We have the open system and the base system – two systems which are essentially contradictory which we will need to resolve.

Some other issues have been raised by the opposition on the infrastructure - you have mentioned the roads et cetera. Again, as I have already mentioned, this is an issue which we, as a Government, have inherited, and a lot of those issues were because you guys spent the budget and in December it was done, there was no money - that is why the roads you are going on has a lot of potholes. You are twisting it around. Instead, you should be saying “We are the result of the bad roads, not you.”

A lot of the issues raised are symptoms or outcomes of what has been happening in the last few years - it did not just happen now. It is the results of frameworks and systems which have been there for the last 10 or so years and we are in the process of looking at those issues including the roads - I have mentioned it. The reform within FRA, the reform within PWD - a lot of the roads you mention have been neglected because FRA in the past has said that it is a non-FRA road. That is the problem, but now we are working at amalgamating those and ensuring that not only the institutions but also the infrastructure, move forward as one. Thank you.

HON.V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I rise in support of the motion and would like to thank the former committee members and the current committee members for the report and also like to thank the LTA Management for the work done during those particular years of the report.

Mr. Speaker Sir, my colleagues have already spoken on a lot of points, so once again I support the motion before the Parliament.

HON. PROF B. C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr Speaker Sir.

HON. K.K. LAL.- When will you fix the potholes, honourable Minister?

MR. SPEAKER.- Just try to listen, honourable Member.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- I know the honourable Minister provided the responses very well. He basically destroyed the myth or the lies that keep coming from the other side, especially some of the new honourable Members. I think the older ones probably understand the legacy.

Let me just remind them, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 Reports. This itself proves the point that honourable Minister Tuisawau was making about the laxity issues. Honourable Tuinaceva was a Chief Executive Officer in 2015 so I am not sure whether he is also responsible for the delay in getting these Reports.

Let me just give you an example. We are looking at the Reports and we cannot understand how an organisation does if the Reports do not come on a timely manner, and if they are not scrutinised by the Office of the Auditor-General or not scrutinised by the Parliament - this was a consistent problem. All of us in the Opposition knew about the previous governments inability to bring Annual Reports on time.

HON. K.K. LAL.- *Levu na vosa, lailai na cakacaka.*

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- So, we are looking at 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2017-2018, this is the update. They do not like this, but this is the fact.

(Chorus of interjections)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the update of the reports:

- 2017-2018 - the Annual Report design has been completed, this has yet to be finalised and printed.
- 2018-2019 - this is in progress, the Report will be designed and printed in the 2023-2024 financial year.
- 2019-2020 - this is in progress. The completion of the Report is dependent on the completion of the audit.
- 2020-2021 - this is in progress. The completion of the Report is dependent on the completion of the audit.
- 2021-2022 - this is in progress. The completion of the Report is dependent on the completion of the audit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talk about the problems that we have. They were the most manipulative government in terms of what was happening in the Land Transport Authority. The whole apparatus and organisation were dysfunctional. That is why we have not been able to get the Reports on time. Here we are talking about these Reports and trying to tell the new Government what it should have done in the last six months.

HON. P.D. KUMAR - Nine months.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Of course, we are doing it. As the honourable Minister said, they are talking about the road conditions. Yes, we know there are potholes.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, fix it.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, we know there are potholes during their time.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No!

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- But when we came into power, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they had spent the whole budget for a year in six months.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- There were crooks running some of those organisations. Crooks sitting on the board. Crooks running the organisation and they were not able to fix and spend money and give value for money.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- I thought we were in a fish market.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- There is Point of Order under Standing Order 74(1)(a), Parliamentary practice.

Mr. Speaker, time and time again the honourable Minister for Finance is labelling accusations and calling people crooks and liars...

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- No, no, you are not the Speaker.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is about time if you are worth your salt in this Parliament, if you are going to label an accusation against anyone, give it with some proof.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Prove it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has to come up with the proof. He has labelled accusations against Board Members, LTA, et cetera - please give us the proof.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- And bring the report.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It will come, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let them wait.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Some, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have already been identified. That is a fact...

HON. K.K. LAL.- Name them.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The new Board is on the dot, they are working on it. The Minister is working on it...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Excellent.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and we are going to make sure that from now onward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have value for money. We have a right environment, right process to follow so that we ensure there is value for money. But the point that they need to admit, they need to accept is that we were not able to produce annual reports on time. The Auditor-General was not able to look at the accounts. How can we in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the horse has bolted already - audit reports are pending for years. How can you run an organisation based on that?

That is the point we are making, and we are now as a Government, we are making sure and we will ensure that there is proper monitoring, evaluation of organisations, statutory organisations, government commercial companies where Government puts in taxpayers funds, that we get timely annual reports. We get timely audits so that we have a proper perspective on how the organisations are running and whether they are performing. That is the most important aspect of the work of this Parliament, the work of various Committees but if the reports are not there, how can we do that, Mr. Speaker?

Let me just conclude by saying that the Government in the last Budget has provided adequate funding to LTA and FRA. There are new structures, new processes are being put in place, a lot of work has already been done, and roads are being identified. Of course, we understand there are areas where the roads need urgent attention, there are potholes in some of the roads, but that is going to be fixed and I want to assure the people of Fiji and those who are affected in areas where the roads are not as good as it ought to be - the Fiji Roads Authority as the honourable Minister said, is on track and these issues will be addressed as quickly as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all our honourable Members that contributed to the motion before Parliament. Again, I would like to urge the agency concerned through the relevant Ministry to work on the submission of the other pending annual reports. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members that brings us to the end of the sitting today. Before we rise, I think dinner is being prepared in the Big Committee Room - thank you again for your contribution. The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.34 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 111/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services (Ref. Page: 1712)



MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES
(Hon. Ratu A.R. Lalabalavu)

Response to Question No. 111/2023 is as follows:

The ambulance service is an integral part of the whole health service and it connects the people directly to the healthcare, thereby, enhancing our people's access to health services.

In Fiji, we have continued to witness the increasing demand for ambulance services and our ambulance area always on the move to retrieve patients from their homes in the community, or from sites or motor vehicle accidents or other sites where the injured or sick is waiting, or to transfer patients between health facilities.

At the height of the COVID-19 outbreak in Fiji, ambulances and ambulance services were in high demand, particularly in regions where the outbreak was happening to not only carry COVID-19 patients to and from the isolation facilities, but also attend to patients with other non-COVID medical conditions that also require their transfer to the health facilities.

Our ambulances traverse many rugged and rough terrain throughout the country to access our remote communities, such as in the highlands, in the interior of Navosa, Naitasiri and Ra, the rural villages in Tailevu, Macuata and Cakaudrove, and maritime communities with road access such as on the island of Ovalau, and this is critical for our effort to achieve Universal Health Coverage and ensure that no one is left behind in accessing the essential healthcare they need. This is in line with the Government's intent for health service in Fiji, so the ambulances we have are helping us to achieve this mission.

At the moment, ambulances are allocated to the eight major Hospitals or cost centres and they are:

- CWM Hospital;
- Lautoka Hospital;
- Tamavua Twomey Hospital;
- St. Giles Hospital;
- Central Health Services;
- Eastern Health Services;
- Western Health Services; and
- Northern Health Services.

For the past six months of the last financial year, a total of \$1.7 million was spent on Ambulance Services. Ambulance service is also intimately linked to our retrieval services that is conducted primarily by our Emergency Medicine Physicians but also other specialities in our referral hospitals.

To maximise the impact of having ambulance services, we have also invested in improving our patient retrieval capabilities through ongoing training for our doctors and nurses in the Emergency Medicine Departments, as well as other clinical departments that provide critical healthcare, place specialists from our referral hospitals at the peripheral health facilities to build capacity and improve diagnosis and management of patients, as well as continue to procure medical equipment and supplies that will support their work.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 112/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services (Ref. Page: 1712)



**MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES
(Hon. Ratu A.R. Lalabalavu)**

Response to Question No. 112/2023 is as follows:

There have been a total of 417 resignations for doctors, nurses and Allied Health Workers in the past 16 months. A summary of the resignations is as follows:

- 326 Nurses;
- 54 Medical Officers; and
- 37 Allied Health Workers that include five Dietitians, six Environmental Health Officers, 11 Laboratory Technicians, 12 Medical Imaging Technologists and three Physiotherapists.

These attrition numbers are due to many pull and push factors that include emigration, the search for greener pastures, education, family welfare, higher salaries and aggressive recruitment techniques by overseas recruitment agencies and local private hospitals.

As I have earlier mentioned in one of my parliamentary Statements, these losses impact our ability to deliver quality services and also increases the burden for those who remain with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

In recognising that we are losing experienced personnel, the Ministry has also pursued capacity building for its current workforce with the support of central agencies of Government and supplemented by our development partners.

The in-service training for Medical Officers have ensured that our doctors are upskilled and updated in knowledge, skills and competencies, while attaining post-graduate qualification.

For the 2023 academic year, the Australian Government Pacific Scholarship for Midwifery sponsored 20 registered nurses through its in-service training budget. As such, a total of 40 registered nurses are expected to graduate as midwives at the end of the 2023 academic year and they will be formally recruited in 2024.

For doctors, a total of 150 Medical Interns were recruited in January of this year, while 80 Medical Officers (MOs) have been recruited as of today, with the remaining to be recruited as soon as they complete their internship.

For Oral Health Practitioners, a total of 205 Oral Health Practitioners with another 25 to be recruited in the last financial year, bringing the total to 230.

For Allied Health Workers such as Dietitians, Physiotherapists, Pharmacists, Medical Imaging Technologists, Laboratory Assistants and Environmental Health Officers and Biomedical

Technicians, 558 of the 717 positions have been filled through an ongoing recruitment process and 87 more posts were processed during the last financial year.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 113/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration (Ref. Page: 1713)



**MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION
(Hon. P. Tikoduadua)**

Response to Question No. 113/2023 is as follows:

- (a) Fijians continue to migrate to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA mainly for employment and study purpose, according to information gathered from departure records. Between 1st January, 2023 and 31st August, 2023, Fijians migrated for education/training purpose is around 3,650, approximately 5,552 for employment and 1,946 migrating to traditional peers Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

There is limited information on both, immigration border system and departure records, to ascertain the total number of Fijians travelling abroad for holiday on visitor's visa. The Immigration Department continues to work on addressing these challenges with development partners and areas that could enhance our systems at our port of entries for both, aerodrome and maritime.

- (b) Fijians travelled for visiting purpose and have not returned during the period (1st January, 2023 to 31st August, 2023) cannot be captured on the border system. The Department will continue to focus on immigration flows and implement relevant policies to address its immigration challenges. Various other indicative data are not fully integrated into the system electronically, thus providing the essential data is difficult since countries of destination process and capture their own visitor's visa data.