

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**WEDNESDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER, 2023**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes ... ..	1760
Communication from the Speaker ... ..	1760
Presentation of Reports of Committees ... ..	1760-1761
(1) Review Report – Ba Town Council 2019 Annual Report	
Ministerial Statements ... ..	1761-1773
(1) Violence Against Children in Fiji – Hon. L.D. Tabuya	
(2) Livestock Breeding Programme for Farmers in Fiji – Hon. V.T.T.K. Rayalu	
(3) 2023 International Youth Day Celebration – Hon. J. Saukuru	
Questions ... ..	1773-1794
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Sugar Cane Growers Election (Q/No. 115/2023)	
(2) EFL Grid Extension Work Programme (Q/No. 116/2023)	
(3) Support Systems for Single Mothers (Q/No. 117/2023)	
(4) Update – 4 <sup>th</sup> Review of Fiji’s Trade Policy (Q/No. 118/2023)	
(5) Construction/Extension of Nayavu Health Centre (Q/No. 119/2023)	
(6) Progress of Land Development for Informal Settlements (Q/No. 120/2023)	
(7) Promotion of Digital Literacy (Q/No. 122/2023)	
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Labour Recruitment Firms (Q/No. 123/2023)	
(2) List of LTA Projects & Programmes (Q/No. 124/2023)	
(3) List of MSAF Projects & Programmes (Q/No. 125/2023)	
2023 Parliament Sitting Calendar – Amendment of ... ..	1794-1798
Establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission ... ..	1798-1803,1805-1827
Suspension of Standing Orders ... ..	1803-1804

**WEDNESDAY, 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2023**

The Parliament resumed at 9.44 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 Tuesday, 12th 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.

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER**

Welcome

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

**PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

Review Report - Ba Town Council 2019 Annual Report

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, this morning, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of Ba Town Council 2019 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, this review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), which mandates the committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labor, culture, and media.

The Ba Town Council Annual Report 2019 was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs during the 2018-2022 parliamentary term. In this new term of Parliament, the Annual Report was re-introduced and referred to the current standing Committee. Through its normal process for report scrutiny, the committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

The Committee acknowledged the commitment of Ba in the upkeep of urban sanitary and

the continuity of rezoning in the district. This contributes positively to the district of Ba for the year 2019.

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.

I would also 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 (CEO) and Management of Ba 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 take note of the Report.

(Report handed 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.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection;
2. Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways; and
3. Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

Honourable Members, Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Ministers, I will then 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.

### Violence Against Children in Fiji

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I begin my Ministerial Statement, I wish to wish our honourable Prime Minister a very happy birthday today.

(Acclamation)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members; I would like to start my Ministerial Statement with a verse from the *Holy Bible*, Psalm 127: 3 which says, and I quote: "Children are the gift from the Lord, and they are a reward from him".

Mr. Speaker, I wish to make reference to a well-known quote: “Our Children are the foundation and future leaders of our country”.

We must, at all costs, ensure that we, as a nation, strengthen our commitment to caring for and protecting our children. Each child in Fiji depends on us to make decisions that will guarantee they are safe and their rights are protected, to ensure they have a bright future to reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, there is a sad reality in our country. Children are still subject to physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse and neglect.

Mr. Speaker, we have been informed of the statistics of violence against women which is two in every three women in this country or 64 percent of women face some form of violence in their lifetime. However, Mr. Speaker, the statistics for children is far worse - four out of five children, that is 83 percent of our children are facing some form of abuse or violence.

Mr. Speaker, the Child Welfare Act (CWA) database reported in 2022 a total of almost 2,000 cases. This was a 29 percent increase from 2021, which was 1,500 cases reported. According to the statistics for 2022:

- child victims were girls - 54 percent;
- child neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse - 68 percent;
- child victims were below the age of 12 - 58 percent;
- child victims were below the age of 1 - 3.7 percent; and
- perpetrators are known to the victims - 80 percent; and
- immediate family members - 60 percent.

For this year alone, a total of almost a thousand cases have been reported between the months of January to July. In the same period last year, it was a total of 1,200 cases. This was a decrease compared to last year. However, cases are still being reported from these months and can increase.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the 956 cases reported this year:

- 54 percent of the victims were girls;
- 75 percent of the cases are of neglect, physical abuse, behavioural and sexual abuse;
- 4 percent of the victims are below the age of one;
- 75 percent of the perpetrators are known to the victims. Out of the 75 percent, 70 percent are immediate family members, so these numbers are on the rise.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the day recognises the importance of establishing a dedicated Department for Children, to effectively address increasing incidents of social issues involving our children. As you all know, we have allocated a budget to the establishment of the Department for Children of \$100,000 initially which will see to having the Director for Children, Principal Officer and another Officer, as I had mentioned, to start it off.

At this juncture, I wish to inform the Parliament that the Ministry is in the process of recruiting the Director and other key positions. Of course, Government continues the funding of \$200,000 for Child Protection; \$2,000 for the Child Helpline; \$10,000 for the development of Childcare Policy and Programme; \$230,000 for grants to voluntary organisations managing our children’s homes and Empower Pacific; \$100,000 for the State Home for Girls; and \$692,000 for the Boys Centre or juveniles.

Mr. Speaker, this time, I would like to explain a little bit about the frangipani lapel pins which were distributed earlier this week, and I thank all honourable Members for wearing them today. Allow me to share the story of the frangipani with you my colleagues and of course to the members of the public and those who are watching.

The frangipani is a flower that grows from the plumeria temple tree. For the tree to flower, it strongly depends on the environment in which it grows. In order for the frangipani to manifest its soft and enriching qualities, the roots of the tree must be strong. When a frangipani is fully developed, it consists of five petals. A frangipani can come in diverse range of colour combination and exudes a beautiful, sweet fragrance. The petals of the flowers are delicate, pure looking and need proper care and attention in order to sustain its features.

The nature of the frangipani exemplifies the natural essence of a child. The flower is a symbol of a child and the roots from which the flower grows symbolises families, communities, schools, our culture, our religion. These roots, when strong enough, will help the child grow and develop the five petals. These five petals symbolise the core values of love, trust, protection, care and respect.

In order to help children grow, their roots must work together by guiding them, speaking up and being their voices. Families and communities must spend time with their children and focus on enriching their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Every frangipani, like a child, is unique. For each flower to bloom and for each child to flourish it requires nurturing, care and love.

We carry the symbol of the frangipani with us to remind ourselves of the potential of every child. Child Protection is all of our responsibility, not just the Government and we must ensure that every child feels loved, protected, respected, cared for and trusted in order for them to reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, last month, a group called the Concerned Citizens of Fiji, led by Pastor Joe Yaya, approached me and sought for us to host the screening of the highly anticipated movie called “Sounds of Freedom”. This film sends a very powerful call to action and exposes the global activity on this legal and severe form of child sexual abuse which includes kidnapping and transferring of children for the purposes of forced labour and exploitation for child sex trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, I accepted this proposal, and it links well with the Ministry’s mandated role in the care and protection of children, through creating awareness. If any Member of this Parliament has not seen this movie, I do implore you to, please, watch, it is based on a true story of trafficking of children.

During the screening on 24<sup>th</sup> August, we invited Members of Parliament, representatives from across Government agencies, Foreign Missions, international governmental organisations, Civil Society Organisations, faith-based organisations, media partners and also members of the public, to attend.

Mr. Speaker, the main actor (Jim Caviezel) shares at the end of the movie, his own excerpt of why he supports the movie and why we should create awareness on child trafficking. He said that we need to be aware that even though human trafficking may not be visible in our country, it is happening. The line of the movie that I wish to share here in Parliament is that, God’s children are not for sale.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry, in partnership with UNICEF, the University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji National University (FNU) and MFAT (New Zealand), is launching the Violence against Children in Fiji Report at the end of this month on 26<sup>th</sup> September, to which we will all be invited as

Members of Parliament, at 5.00 p.m. at the University of the South Pacific. Our Ministry commissioned this Report at USP and FNU to conduct this joint research with a specific focus on children in the home setting. As I had mentioned, this month on 26<sup>th</sup> September, we will be launching this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite previous efforts, we see high numbers of violations continuing, including child rape and neglect. Levels of sexual violence are very high against teenage girl children, but do include cases down to infants under five years of age, and these are some of the findings in this Report.

Majority of the perpetrators are family members. The Report provides an indication of geographical hotspots by type of violation. This study represents a significant and timely step forward in the protection of children in Fiji. Evidence-based reports provide a solid footing to set targets connected without outcomes for children, including child friendly services and reduced rates of children in institutional care.

There are clear recommendations in this Report on the need for a whole of Government and whole of society approach and improve coordination across our key Ministries. Importantly, the Report also provides material to inform and focus prevention efforts whether with parents, communities, religious leaders or with children themselves which, going forward, needs to include boys.

Mr. Speaker, lastly on 19<sup>th</sup> November, the Ministry will be commemorating the International Day for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and the theme for this year is, "Every Child is one caring adult away from being a success story - it starts with us". The theme emphasises the importance of fulfilling our responsibility as a parent or guardian. This is also extended to our communities, our places of worship and many public spaces in which a child is in. No matter what your role is, child protection is everyone's responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, child abuse in all its forms exists in Fiji and we have heard the recent statistics and trends - very worrying trends. We, as a Ministry, will continue to work with our stakeholders to increase awareness on child abuse and neglect.

To this end, I would like to begin with our esteemed colleagues in Parliament and hopefully, in time to come, we will organise with Parliament to have an informational session on this very topic to raise awareness on child welfare issues, including the relevant laws and international laws, which the Fiji Government has ratified to address child abuse and strengthen the rights of a child.

We believe that as Members of Parliament, we are the public figures in our communities and we can play a vital role in supporting the Ministry to being champions for children or child advocates. Once again, I thank you for donning the frangipani pins to raise awareness about caring for our children.

I would conclude by reminding us of the theme for this year "Every Child is one caring adult away from being a success story - it starts with us".

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Leader of Opposition or his designate to responds.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, I would like to echo the birthday well wishes from Members of Parliament: Happy birthday, Sir.

Honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members; I think most of us in this Parliament are parents and grandparents and some may be great grandparents. Congratulations, honourable Prime Minister, for being a great grandparent. Anything to do with children is always something that is very important for us.

First of all, I would like to thank the Ministry and the honourable Minister for continuing this focus on children. I think all Governments in the past have held children to be dear, as you have mentioned. They are a gift from God and it is our job to make sure that they flourish in an environment where they are not abused, they are not subject to neglect and they can realise the full potential of their being created because we believe that when every child is created, there is a future that is there for that particular child.

That future, as has been explained by the honourable Minister in the ideology behind the petals of the *bua* (frangipani), the *bua* (frangipani) is named after Bua, the *vanua* of the *yalomatua*. I think it is a reflection that if you have *yalomatua*, you will make sure that you look after the children that we have because the petals have been explained. Bua and Verata, I do not know which one comes first.

(Laughter)

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to say that we have read with great trepidation and horror some of the stories that have been coming out lately about the extent of violence against children. It is not just sexual violence, it is also a lot of the psychological violence. I think one of the great things that we have been able to do in this country - our traditional notions about how we think about children have evolved. I remember when I was a child, children used to sit or eat later on when we sat down to eat.

Today, we are beginning to see these values beginning to change. If I read about the whole history of how children were treated in the past, they were treated as not very important at all. Over time, it has evolved, but I think whilst we that live today, a lot of their abuses are more subtle. They are more ingrained into some of the things that we do, so it is incumbent upon us to take this action.

Having this frangipani and lapel pins, I have heard my children and grandchildren ask me what it stands for? So, I told them it is something to do with violence against children and I am hoping and looking forward to grip all the plans that you have in place and the call for all stakeholders to become involved is something that we will all play our part.

From our part in this Parliament, we will make sure that we do that because the children, as we say, are gifts from God to us. Some of the statistics that the Minister has talked about here are quite shocking. I find it quite shocking - 75 percent of the abuse was known, sexual perpetrators of people are known by the child, and 70 percent from family members. I think that tells us that the solution is not going to be handled by laws, it will need a multi-faceted approach from all of us.

We, on this side of Parliament, commit to taking this message and we hope to be there at the launch of that Report on Violence Against Children in Fiji and the International Day Against Child Abuse and Neglect. We look forward to the Government to be able to take the next step with the report coming out and the development to the programmes, the plans, the policies, the outputs and the targets to make sure that we, in our time, in leading this country here that we can reverse this trap that we are seeing. It keeps on going up.

I think one of the statistics that the honourable Minister talked about was the 29 percent increase in case of child abuse. Sometimes people say that some of these increases are because



people are now reporting more of the things that were happening in the past. I hope it is just that, but it could be that there is also an increase in the propensity of abuse happening.

Mr. Speaker Sir, from our side, we fully appreciate the initiatives for the frangipani badge and also the development to the Report on Violence Against Children in Fiji. We look forward to the programmes and we call upon all stakeholders in this country - the Churches, communities and all of us, to join hands and to make sure that we join hands in attacking this curse so that during our time, this increase in child abuse reverses and begins to go down.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members just to pause for a minute and think of this very important subject that we have heard from the honourable Minister for Women and the input provided by the designate for the Leader of the Opposition, all he has asked is, we all have a vested interest in this because they are our future, they are our children. But if this statement is just going to be made and then passed through without any collective effort from us, or from you honourable Members, then the issue will still be an ongoing one, without any hopeful decision to address the very source of the problem and that is from the family, from the *mataqali*, et cetera.

All I just want to raise is, what has happened to the institution that used to be there in Nasinu - Nasinu Approved School. If the army has taken over, why can they not join the Army? You remember for the British Armed Forces who want to join, they are not worried about your age or your education level. They put an advertisement out in the streets, "We will educate you, we will school you". All you need to do is join the army. There are different cadre of age groups that join the armed forces because they are joining the Disciplined Forces, what we are trying to do is keep them off the streets.

I just said the other day that I almost ran into some, they were crossing the street at Nabukalou to go below the bridge. That is where they spend most of their evenings. They are our people. I sincerely ask both sides of Parliament to, please, if we could play a much more active role on this, rather than the initiative on the yellow *buu*, where the *buu* comes from, where the name comes from. It is good, but does it address the issue or is that just another lapel pin on your jacket there?

I like the yellow ribbon concept, they got the *vanua* involved, they got the people involved, yet we still have people frequently in the prisons every now and again. They get free food, free medical supplies, free medical check-up when in prison, even though the conviction is added to your history. That is all that I want to raise as the matter of concern because every now and again, we will get this kind of statements, but what have we done to address the issue?

Honourable Members, I leave that to you and plead with you that we need to take a collective position on this. Let us try and address the issue and hammer the head on the nail right on the head instead of sideways or whatever.

#### Livestock Breeding Programme for Farmers in Fiji

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a statement on the Livestock Breeding Programme for farmers in Fiji. The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; one of the core roles of the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is to ensure the supply of high quality livestock breed and breeding stock to farmers with the view to improve the quality of genetics on their farms.

The Ministry of Agriculture is committed to breeding and distributing high performing breeds of sheep, goats and cattle to farmers in Fiji. Apart from supplying quality livestock genetics, the

Ministry is also committed to assisting farmers with technical support and capacity building to ensure the sustainability of the breeding programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Livestock Nucleus are reared on eight livestock Government Research Stations in Fiji, and these are:

1. Koronivia Research Station;
2. Sigatoka Research Station;
3. Wairara Bull Station;
4. Dobuilevu Bull Station;
5. Nawaicoba Sheep Station;
6. Seaqaqa Sheep Station;
7. Batiri Sheep Station; and
8. Mua Sheep Station in Taveuni.

Note that the stations are geographically spread out due to these programmes being national programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the various livestock species are bred on Government Research Stations using bio-technology interventions such as embryo transfer, artificial insemination and controlled natural mating. The livestock progenies produced from the breeding programmes are carefully selected based on good genetic attributes which are then sold to farmers with the aim of improving genetics of livestock on their farms. The breeds on the Government Research Stations are assessed and evaluated on their adaptability to local conditions and resilience to impacts of climate change and disease as well as on production levels before they are released to farmers for breeding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Nucleus Stock for different livestock breeds are adequately reared on the Government Stations where execution of the best animal welfare and good farm management practices are conducted to produce quality livestock progenies. Livestock rearing, breeding, nutrition, health and husbandry practices are professionally carried out by the Ministry to ensure quality livestock are produced and supplied to farmers. Note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that good genetics goes with good feed if we want livestock products of high quality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the existing livestock breeding plans, the Ministry intends to sell the improved livestock breeds to farms in the form of live animals and this programme is further supported through artificial insemination and control making on those farms. In the last financial year, the Ministry has supplied six Senepol, five Brown Swiss and three F1 Senepol crossed with local breeds of cattle to selected farms. Sir, 68 improved breed of sheep were supplied from the Nawaicoba Research Station and 82 were supplied from Seaqaqa Research Station to selected farms. Also, 26 improved breed of goats were also supplied from the Sigatoka Research Station to selected farms for breeding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Livestock Breeding Programme for the current financial year, the Ministry anticipates selling 80 bulls of improved breeds to selected farms in Fiji. Let me inform this august Parliament,

Mr. Speaker Sir, we currently have four Senepol bulls that weigh over one tonne in the Sigatoka Research Station, the heaviest being 1.4 tonne. I must give credit to the current Leader of the Opposition because when he was our Minister, we had embarked on this very ambitious programme where we had difficulty in convincing the Ministry of Economy to give us money for this Programme. But eventually, the Minister through his intervention, managed to get the funds for

this Programme and I was the unfortunate officer sent to Australia to accompany the embryos back to Fiji.

(Laughter)

The Ministry's Breed Improvement Support Programme through the provision of artificial insemination services will be targeted at beef and dairy farms in the current financial year. The Ministry intends to produce 2,000 semen straws locally from the improved cattle breeds in the Sigatoka Research Station which is intended to be inseminated in cows on selected farms in Fiji.

To support the pool of locally harvested semen, the Ministry will also be importing 160 dairy that is Jersey, Friesian and Kiwi Cross genetics and 160 beef, that is, Hereford genetics of frozen semen straws from New Zealand to further improve the genetics on our farms in Fiji.

For sheep, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry anticipates to supply 400 breeding stock (70 percent male and 30 percent female) to potential farms in Fiji.

For goats, the Ministry intends to supply 100 breeding stock (80 percent male and 20 percent female) to potential farms in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the current improved breeds that exist at our Research Stations are as follows:

- For dairy cattle, we have the Kiwi Cross, Brown Swiss and Crossbred (F1) between Brown Swiss and the Kiwi Cross breed.
- For beef cattle, we have the Senepol, we have the Drought Master and we have the Wagyu. For those of you who may not know, 'Wagyu' is the most expensive beef in the world and it goes for US\$250 per kilogramme, but it is here in Fiji through embryo transfer. We have F1 Cross from Senepol crossed with the local breed, and the local cattle.
- For sheep, we have the Fiji Fantastic breed which is the locally produced breed, we have the Dorper breed, we have the F1 from Fiji Fantastic crossed with Dorper and the F2 from the F1 crossed with Dorper.
- For goats, we have the Anglo Nubian, we have the imported Boer, we have F1, that is the Anglo Nubian crossed with the Boer, and we have F2 which is F1 crossed with Boer, we have the imported Anglo Nubian, and we have the imported Saanen and Toggenburg, which are both dairy goat breed and these are crossed with the local goats.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the key criteria that are set out by the Ministry for farms to receive improved breeds of livestock are as follows:

- Farms need to be free from disease;
- Farms need to have the required number of female livestock for breeding; and
- Farms need to have sufficient land for expansion and to cater for the increase in livestock numbers.

The Ministry is promoting commercial agriculture as one of its priorities under its Strategic Development Plan, and packages for assistance to farmers for farm development have been made available online to support this sector and assistance such as fencing, pasture improvement and infrastructure development on the farm.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the livestock breeding activities under the Ministry are supported through capital programmes in this financial year and funds allocated are as follows:

- Beef breeding - \$1 million;
- Livestock rehabilitation (cattle) - \$400,000;
- Sheep Breeding - \$400,000; and
- Goat breeding - \$215,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to have adequate number of improved breeds of livestock in Fiji, the Ministry has made a commitment to the following:

- Upgrade Government owned nucleus stock through embryo transfer technology in cattle and artificial insemination in sheep and goat.
- Operationalise the cattle breeding centre at Sigatoka Research Station to supply cattle with improved genetics in the form of semen through straws.
- Increase the number of breeding stock on Government stations so that adequate improved breeds of livestock are available for distribution to farmers when needed.
- Improve nutrition through pasture development and supplementary feed formulation.
- Control and eradicate endemic disease in livestock in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, improving the genetic makeup of livestock breeds in Fiji remains a high priority for the Ministry of Agriculture. With improved breeds, better husbandry management and disease control, we aim to increase the volume of local meat and the whole milk production and aim to reduce our import bill for those products.

The Ministry will continue with its breeding programmes on research stations and collaborate with its partners on adaptive research, and better coordinate with stakeholders and farmers on the ground with the aim to grow the livestock sector in Fiji.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just be very brief, but let me again convey, on behalf of the Members of the Opposition, our very best wishes to the honourable Prime Minister on his birthday.

As I have stated, I do not have much to add, but we, as Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, are very much looking forward to our field visit, subject to your approval in the next two weeks so that we can see the programmes and the new breeds.

The honourable Minister always says that he is the unfortunate one to go and bring the embryos because of two reasons, firstly, it coincided with the well renowned Israeli Agriculture Show. He said that he was victimised in that decision because he wanted to go to the Holy Land. Secondly, I always say as a joke to him that because he accompanied the embryos, there was no live animal that was brought into Fiji, so he is the father of the bulls.

MR. SPEAKER.- I was a bit worried about that.

(Laughter)

So if you see the animals, Sir, I think it will make a lot of sense too.

(Laughter)

But, on a serious note, again, transforming the agriculture sector takes time, particularly research. I think we are at this juncture where we can build on the potentials and the opportunities that are here. Again, huge potentials and all that, I would plead to Government is the support that will be needed, particularly in terms of infrastructure because I know with embryos, one of the initial difficulties was the storage and the need for us to have all the proper gadgets and technology involved. May I acknowledge, Mr. Simon Walton, the main man behind the embryo transfer. What is needed is the support to the honourable Minister and, of course, the Assistant Minister. as well.

I would just like to encourage all those with land, including your good self, Sir, because there is a lot of potential. All landowners in Fiji, freehold landowners and *iTaukei* landowners because we have the breed in here but I think in the transitioning, I know that currently they are already in discussions with the *Turaga na Ka Levu* and some others, they are approaching a few because as we all know, we need to revive Yalavou, Yaqara and, of course, Tilivalevu. I know that agriculture is looking for land in which they can expand this programme and, again, to all the stakeholders particularly the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, iTLTB and Ministry of Lands, if they have some land deposited into the Land Bank, a huge opportunity is in here.

I have talked about the necessary support, I know that the honourable Minister has talked about the nutrition aspect because he spoke about the one tonne plus weight that the bulls have gained but it took them about five years, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In the most ideal condition, these breeds can hit that weight at around three and half years and that is why the nutrition aspect is so important and probably something that the Government needs to consider seriously as well in supporting the honourable Minister to achieve his aims.

Again, genetics are here, we just need to provide the environment for the expansion because as the honourable Minister has stated very clearly, the challenge for us right now is the shift from research into commercial production so that we can reduce our import levels and, of course, increase our export levels.

The honourable Minister did talk about, not only cattle but the dairy cows as well. I am thankful for the new initiative, again, for further cross breeding but we were fortunate to have been able to have the Brown Swiss as the honourable Minister has already alluded to. I am told in some of my conversations with Ministry of Agriculture staff that right now, those cows are hitting almost 20 litres, our dairy cows normally hit 5 litres to 10 litres at their best. Again, nutrition is important. I am told that in the second round of their lactation, they are now reaching 20 litres and above. So, huge potentials, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have nothing further to add but to wish the honourable Minister all the very best in this programme.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition for those scientific comments, especially with the massive weight of the bulls and the scientific approach that you now use in getting embryos and whatever you stated there to be inseminated, and that is very educational.

Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for morning tea and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.35 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.17 a.m.

### 2023 International Youth Day Celebration

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to address this august House by providing an update of this year's International Youth Day Celebration and the impact it created. Before I do that, on behalf of our youth in Fiji and all the sportspeople and sporting bodies, we wish to congratulate the honourable Prime Minister on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and we wish him a long life. I further we wish to congratulate our Fiji Water Flying Fijians for the remarkable game they played against Wales. We wish them well in the next game against the Australian Wallabies.

International Youth Day is observed annually the world over on 12<sup>th</sup> August. It is meant as an opportunity for Government and others to draw attention to youth issues worldwide. This year, the event was held in four different locations around Fiji namely; Western, Northern, Central and Eastern, spanning from 3<sup>rd</sup> August to 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, the 2023 International Youth Day was, undoubtedly, a remarkable event that highlighted the essential theme of "Green Skills for Youth Towards a Sustainable World". In this age of pressing environmental challenges, it is vital for us to empower our young population with the necessary skills and knowledge to build a sustainable future. The Ministry of Youth and Sports recognised this urgency and orchestrated a celebration that fostered awareness, education and employment opportunities for our youth.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very young population, current figures indicate that up to 70 percent of our population is youth under 40. This is significant and indicates the challenges we face as a country regarding full employment to ensure our economy continues to grow. A drastic drop in employment post-COVID-19 with the country recovering, and the recent influx of migration of workers overseas has had many negative implications not only on the economy but on the lives of many young people in the country.

Mr. Speaker, with unemployment amongst youth, comes a whole host of socio-economic issues such mental health problems, domestic and gender violence, alcohol and drug use and crime. Additionally, being unemployed is associated with increased risk of death by suicide and this negatively affects physical well-being of youth, hinders skills development, causes youth homelessness, increased population of street kids and increased poverty, especially in urban and peri urban communities.

It is against this backdrop that the Ministry launched a "Youth Career Fair" as part of the International Youth Day Celebration. The Youth Career Fair aimed to address the high youth unemployment rate in Fiji by focusing on eco-friendly industries, also filling the skills gap and available local job opportunities, hence creating a platform for local employers and environmentally conscious job-seeking youth to connect.

Mr. Speaker, the International Youth Day celebration embarked on the following key expected outcomes:

1. Increased (Green) Employment Opportunities;
2. Enhanced Eco-Literacy Employability;
3. Strengthened Green Collaborations; and
4. Heightened public awareness regarding the importance of green skills, investing in the local workforce, ensuring that employers forge partnerships to address youth unemployment collectively and creating a sustainable future for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, International Youth Day celebrations witnessed a good response with 1,240 youth attending the two-day celebration held at the Fiji National University, Nasinu Campus. Sir, 446 youth attending the celebration held at Labasa Civic Centre, 996 youth attending the celebration held at Nadi Civic Centre and 308 attended a programme held in Kadavu. A total of 2,990 youth were registered during International Youth Day that was celebrated across all four divisions.

Various workshops and interactive sessions were organised to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange. Experts and professionals from different domains of sustainability delivered informative talks to inspire and motivate the young generation to be agents of change in our society. The events featured informative exhibitions, educational programmes that engaged our youth in understanding the significance of green skills. It was indeed heartening to witness the enthusiasm and passion as they actively participated in discussions and practical sessions.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Youth and Sports ensured that the celebrations provided holistic experience for our youth. The collaboration with various stakeholders and organisations working in sustainability played a pivotal role in the success of the event. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the presence of the compliance industry such as the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS), Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), Ministry of Justice through Birth, Death and Marriage and banking sectors provided the enabling environment and a one-stop shop for the youth to take advantage during the Youth Career Fair.

Mr. Speaker, the impact of the programme was realised almost instantly as some youth were interviewed and absorb directly into the workforce. A total of 83 recruitments was done during the International Youth Day 2023 celebration. As of this week, 600 youth are currently training on the job prior to full employment. With discussions we are regularly having with stakeholders, we expect to see an increase in recruitment numbers for those youth who had attended the Career Fair in the coming weeks as employers commence their respective recruitment formalities.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure success in our venture towards effective youth development, firstly, we need to foster partnerships with local and international organisations, youth-led initiatives and community stakeholders to create a broader and more inclusive platform for youth engagement. Collaboration enabled us to tap into diverse resources, expertise and networks, amplifying the impact of the International Youth Day.

Mr. Speaker, we need to address critical global challenges such as climate change, poverty, youth unemployment, inequality, education and health innovatively with our young people. Encourage them to contribute their innovative ideas and solutions towards achieving these goals, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. We need to expend educational opportunities and continually provide platforms for sharing best practices in education, exploring new pedagogical approaches and leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes.

Speaking of youth unemployment, there is a need to strengthen Youth Entrepreneurship by empowering young entrepreneurs through creating an enabling environment that supports youth-led businesses and start-ups, facilitate access to finance, mentorship programmes and business development services, enabling young people to turn their innovative ideas into sustainable enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, as a way forward, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has set up a roadmap to have such similar events like the Youth Career Fair on a quarterly basis - to quickly address the need of the industry on human capital and to strengthen youth development agenda aligned to the SDG and the National Development Plan.

Secondly, the Ministry will continuously engage with employers and other line Ministries in continuing to drive partnership/closer collaboration in addressing the current issues of increasing unemployment for our young people, addressing skills gaps that is increasing due to the number of people heading offshore for job opportunities.

Thirdly, the Ministry will seek for an increased budget allocation to support these programmes to ensure effective implementation and sustainability.

Furthermore, the Ministry will establish a targeted approach towards implementing Youth Empowerment and Skills Training by coordinating with employers to ascertain skills needed and organised trainings to meet the demands of the job market. Moreover, the Ministry will setup a database to store information of all youth registered through the Youth Career Fair including their CVs to ensure ease of reference when dealing with employers and employment opportunities available for our youth.

Mr. Speaker, the dedication and hard work put into organising this year's International Youth Day celebrations are commendable and I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the media industry especially the CEO of Fijian Broadcasting Corporation and his team, UNFPA for its continuous support towards youth development, stakeholders, line ministries and our dedicated staff in the Ministry for their unwavering commitment. Our special gratitude to the honourable Sashi Kiran for her support.

As we look ahead to the future of the International Youth Day and Youth Career Fair in Fiji, it is crucial that we build upon the success of this year's event and continue to prioritise the empowerment and development of our youth. Mr. Speaker, together we can create a world where every young person has the opportunity to thrive where their dreams and aspirations are realised and where their contributions are valued.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lack of economic opportunities has led to extreme poverty within our communities. The lack of economic opportunities has also led our youth to illegal activities, like growing marijuana in remote areas and others, as source of income. It is the lack of economic opportunities that has also led more youth to loiter around our urban centres and live on the streets.

However, by aligning the event with the theme of "Green Skills for Youth Towards a Sustainable World" and launching a Youth Career Fair, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has taken a significant step towards empowering our young people to champion environmental sustainability and bridge the gap of the current employment need with different employment sectors and invest on our young people. We are very confident that the knowledge and skills gained by our young generation during these celebrations will shape a brighter and greener future for Fiji.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and esteemed Members of Parliament.

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

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- *Ni sa bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker. This is a subject that we should all be passionate about - our young people. Our future, the future of Fiji, are in the hands of our young.

I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and also for the successful conduct of that international event.



Mr. Speaker Sir, this is a subject, as I have said earlier, that we should be passionate about - all of us who are in this august Parliament. Like the first Ministerial Statement on our young, this is something similar to that. If you are not able to look after them when they are young at that early age, how can we ensure that the future of Fiji will be a peaceful one, or a prosperous one and a stable one?

A few days ago, we gathered and shouted for our gladiators in France, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I believe it is also in that same voice, that same passion and that same commitment, that we should be able to do that this morning, on this day, and shout out to our young, telling them and assuring them, that we are committed to their future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have three key questions this morning that I wish to pose, on behalf of this side of Parliament. The fourth one is really an initiative initiated globally and I believe it resonates with the efforts and the attempts by us all, especially the Government, in directing a pathway for our future generation. The questions are:

1. Are we prepared to advocate strongly on our youth and their future? How do we do that?
2. Can we give them that space that they can live, enjoy and know that they are supported fully by us - the communities in the village, urban, rural and at home?
3. Can we keep them on track?  
Last few days, Mr. Speaker Sir, you have been talking about the Yellow Ribbon programme. In the last few days, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been talking about the Yellow Ribbon Programme. The Yellow Ribbon Programme is about bringing them back on track for those who have gone off track. Can we keep them on track? Our Churches, our *Vanua*, our community, mums and dads, can we keep them on track? So that this Report that you have tabled this morning in this august Parliament becomes a reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir.
4. Can we assure them of our support and our prayers?

I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we have policies, we have a clear direction on where we want to take our youth and prepare them for the future of our nation. Those four questions that I have posed in this august Parliament are important to us all this morning. We advocate, we give them the space, we keep them on track, we assure them of our support and above all, we pray for them.

This side of the Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, fully supports and endorses the Report that has been tabled this morning and we have the assurance on anything and everything to do with the youth, we support it, for therein lies the future of Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- On the next Agenda item which is Questions, I have made some decisions on the first Oral Question. The author, honourable Bala, is not in Parliament and as such, I have allowed honourable Bia to raise this question on his behalf.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

Sugar Cane Growers Election  
(Question No. 115/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament as to when the Sugar Cane Growers election will be conducted as promised to our

cane sector by the Government?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I answer the question, I must congratulate the honourable Prime Minister on his birthday and I wish him well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had prepared a six-page answer and since honourable Bala is not here, I will be very short and sweet. Yes, the election is going to take place as Cabinet has endorsed that Sugar Cane Growers Election and we are now proceeding to hold the Election. Our target is to hold the Election probably on the first quarter of next year.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the honourable Minister for Sugar and the very Minister who said that the Fijian farmers are lazy...

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

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- ...who made that statement and he is here, after the election of the District Directors and will be members of the Sugar Cane Growers Council, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament who is going to fund the operation of the Council?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is a new question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- It is part of the Council.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, I have answered the question which was specific on whether the election will take place, and that it is.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister for Sugar; what measures does the Government have in place to address the concerns and grievances of cane sector stakeholders, if the promised Sugarcane Growers Council Election faces further delay or complications?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, it is a new question, but there will be no delay.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is, how is this Election going to take place? We know it is going to be sector-wise and we know that the number of farmers in each sector has reduced, so are we going to merge the sectors or how are we going to have this Election?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, we are currently looking at the entire formula on all the sectors. Once we determine how many farmers are left, then we will put up the roll. So, let us wait for the Elections Office to help us out.

EFL Grid Extension Work Programme  
(Question No. 116/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the EFL Grid Extension work programme for the current financial year?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question and I thank the honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this financial year, the Ministry has allocated \$4.1 million. This will include grid extension and house wiring, in addition to the \$12.4 million that has been paid in 2022-2023 financial year. This will cater for 111 projects with a total of 1,545 households to benefit from these projects.

It is a reduction from the \$12.4 million to \$4.1 million but this will enable the Department of Energy and Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) to catch up on the backlog from 2018. This will be in addition to the 29 projects that are currently under construction by EFL, which benefits about 1,966 households with a value of \$16.38 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for grid extension, normally communities apply to EFL, EFL does a survey and determines a budget, the Department of Energy proposes this budget which is then paid to EFL to progress the work.

As I have mentioned, there is a backlog and this includes ongoing projects for grid extension with a total of 140 projects from 2018 to 2019 which is worth about \$12.1 million; from 2021-2022 which is worth \$2.05 million; and from 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 which is worth \$15.9 million.

For the information of Parliament, some of the constraints or causes of delays include projects crossing leased areas, for example, Fiji Pine lands with the Navatusila Grid, the limitations in terms of the number of contractors and also their capacities; there have also been issues regarding material shortages - transformers, poles, et cetera; of course, high staff turnover, not only in EFL but also in the Department of Energy; we faced the issue of COVID-19; there have been issues with the revised tenders and costs; global supply chain issues in terms of such technical equipment; inclement weather; and finally also the challenges of our rural roads in terms of access.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the information that has been provided on the continuation of grid extensions. It is good to see that the work is continuing. Now, we can see that the grid has been extended right up to the upper reaches of Naitasiri, across to Tavua and up Namosi. We are glad to see that that work is continuing, and that money has been set aside.

The honourable Minister mentioned that there was also backlog of projects, initially way back to 2017 but now it is from 2018 to 2022. So, the funds for this year will be from 2023 to 2024. I would like to request if the honourable Minister might just give us an update on those backlog where money has already been paid to EFL, I believe now it is only back from 2018 up to 2022, and when is it likely that these projects will be completed?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, those backlogs are nearing completion. Below are the details:

1. Nukulau Village, Yawe, Vuniyasi, Korolevu, Keiyasi, Sigatoka Stage 3 worth \$1.7 million - this has been paid.
2. Navatusila District, Navosa, Sigatoka Stage 1 including Nabutautau Village, Drokadroka, Natoka worth \$5.05 million - this has also been paid.
3. Nalawa District, Nasau, Rakiraki Stage 2 worth \$2.3 million - this has been paid to EFL.
4. Naikelikoso, Wainikoro, Labasa worth \$2.5 million - this has been paid.
5. Welagi, Naselesele, Taveuni Stages 1 and 2 worth \$3.9 million - also conveyed to EFL.

From the information I have been provided with, this will progress significantly this year and, definitely, we will be working towards their completion next year.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to thank the honourable Minister for that feedback. I know the people of Uluisavudua, Sawani, will be celebrating after hearing this news from the honourable Minister. The question is, whether the backlogs cover those who already have the grid, but the power is yet to be released - from the Nacavanadi Junction to Navakaka and those from Nacavanadi Junction to Kasavu, who have been waiting for quite some time now for that. The line is there or grid, but there is no power.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I note that, but as mentioned, what is in the programme is what I have mentioned. But we have also received requests and also there are some in the pipeline which will be factored into the annual budget as we move forward into 2024 to 2025 and onwards.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the mission of EFL is to transition into clean energy in the future. Instead of transitioning to net zero emission, clean energy and zero carbon footprints, how do you justify that these operations are running mostly on diesel operation and causing a lot of air pollution?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a new question. A major percentage of our energy in the country is renewable energy, through hydro. Even in Taveuni, that is hybrid both hydro and also diesel, so that is the target we are working towards.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the honourable Minister would be as he has mentioned that there has been a decrease in the budget from \$12.5 million to \$4.5 million and he has actually mentioned some of the projects that will be undertaken in this financial year. There were two projects earmarked for this financial year, one was for 21 families in Tabia, Labasa and I would like to declare my interest for the second one which is for 15 to 18 families in Bulileka, Labasa. Can the honourable Minister confirm if these projects are still on the lists or have they been removed because of the decrease in the budget?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you honourable Member, I do not have that information with me but I can convey it to you later. You can send me an email on that. Thank you.

Support Systems for Single Mothers  
(Question No. 117/2023)

HON. F.S. KOYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection explain what specific provisions or support systems the Government intends to implement to assist single mothers who might be financially impacted by the recent tax adjustments, especially given their increased responsibility as sole breadwinners?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Yes, the increase in VAT has been acknowledged and is seen in the increase in prices. Certainly, in anticipation of this, honourable Member, you have seen an increase accordingly in terms of our Social Protection Allowance which increased by 25 percent in this year's Budget.

The Government, through the Ministry, especially for single mothers who are sole breadwinners, we have seen an increase in their allowances in terms of the Family Assistance Scheme which used to be called the Poverty Benefit Scheme, as well as Child Protection Allowance, so any children they have they can claim also the Child Protection Allowance which has seen an increase from \$177 to \$196. There is also, of course, the Food Voucher which was only limited to Max Value Supermarket now has been turned to cash so that they have the liberty and the freedom to shop

wherever they want - a cheaper supermarket or to buy fresh produce outside of the supermarket. Before they were limited only to the prices that Max Value is imposing.

Further to our Social Protection Assistance, we have been working with our development partners and our line Ministries to create opportunities for our single mothers as well as our young people who we can train and put to work. One such initiative, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is our partnership with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and APTC and they are piloting this programme which actually began yesterday - 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2023, so we have 10 participants who have been given full scholarships to undertake an entry level Engineering Certificate Level II. So, no experience required, and it runs for 10 weeks until 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2023 where there will be employment-ready and placed in employment.

From the 10 participants who were identified from the HART community and other organisations like Homes of Hope, two are single mothers and there are two from the Nasinu Women's Rugby Club - their names were put up, one participant is from the Veilomani Boys Home in Ba and I wish to thank the Australian Government and APTC for that initiative. While it is a small number, we hope to increase this engagement through APTC and other colleges where we are seeking the support of the Australian Government and other development partners to provide these scholarships for our people.

Mr. Speaker, another initiative is by TVET Pasifika. The advertisement has gone out at the Fiji National University which just started with free courses for our street dwellers, street kids and our people, including single mothers in informal and squatter settlements. This training programme is in domestic electrical installation, basic screen printing, basic cookery, small engine repairs, household and sanitary plumbing.

I wish to thank the honourable Minister for Education and FNU for partnering with our Ministry to provide the scholarships, to deal with our unemployed men, women and youth living in settlements and streets, to have a pathway, to move our people from poverty to productivity.

Mr. Speaker, while our Labour Mobility Programmes are taking a majority of our men, we have a huge opportunity to put our women to work, including our single mums, so we are working with our development partners - Australia and New Zealand, to help us mitigate the loss of labour we are experiencing. I think we, as a Government, and we in this Parliament should demand more from our development partners to come to the table to train our people and incentivise them to stay and not to move overseas.

Mr. Speaker, I am also in negotiation with the honourable Minister for Housing in terms of our single mothers and single parents living in the Public Rental Board flats. I have approached the Ministry and hopefully they are reviewing to see what they can do for our single parents and single mums especially for the huge debts that had been incurred during COVID in terms of rentals because they had lost jobs during that time.

This is something I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Housing for considering this proposal in terms of looking at a way to either reduce or forgive that debt of what was owed from COVID period because of the loss of jobs. I am talking about single parents because there are quite a number of fathers living in Public Rental Board with a number of children who are on Social Welfare that struggling to pay that debt from during the COVID period, but the rentals kept accumulating at PRB so, we hope that we can finalise that soon enough.

Like I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, in mitigating the loss of labour that we are experiencing, we do want to put our women to work. We want to encourage our employers to have childcare in their

places of employment to support our women, because one of the main reasons of absenteeism and other issues that our women face, especially our single mums, is a need for childcare and they are struggling to have this kind of care in their own homes or support from the communities.

We are very grateful for the HART community coming forward in terms the APTC Course because they have agreed to look after the children of the single mums and single parents from the HART community, while these single mums and parents attend to the course for the next 10 weeks. The HART community now providing the childcare to look after their children, so I want to acknowledge the HART community for coming forward.

Companies like Mark One Apparel already has a Child Care facility in their place of employment. Vinod Patel has come forward. Fiji Airways is exploring it. I know I have been speaking with honourable Kamikamica in terms of these BPOs coming into the country that will employ thousands of people, to see to it that there are childcare facilities for our mums or parents to be able to place their children in there.

I know there is a question coming later about Early Childhood Care Centres but working in conjunction with our Ministries also includes our Ministry for Agriculture, Ministry for Fisheries so that we can see to our rural women to have some form of employment.

It is on us to come up with project proposals to put our women to work and they do want to work. So, while the Government is assisting to provide welfare payments, it is a vision and mission of the Coalition Government that we need to move our able-bodied men and women. We are about to complete our database in terms of our able-bodied men and women who are on family assistance Scheme, including our single mums to put them to work.

I wish to just quickly address this issue about the EBayShop. Many are defending it, many are opposing it, but it is time for our people to stop falling for these schemes where they can make a quick buck, make money without having to work for it. We, as Members of Parliament, need to condemn these schemes and we need to encourage our people to apply for jobs. There are so many vacancies, if we are giving money to our young people simply to make them go away or simply to make a quick buck. Let us get our young people, our mums and dads and also young families to apply for employment and to go for training. Now, being available for free and on scholarships, it is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we move our people from poverty to productivity and from a life of welfare to well-being.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the answer which is quite comprehensive. Sir, if I may just have a little extra minute just to add something to it. There is a phenomenal opportunity, and my question is coming with respect to not just single mums.

You said that DFAT and FNU offer training, but there is a phenomenal opportunity for a training exercise and it could be jointly done between the Minister for Trade and yourself because they have a lot of training facilities; financial literacy et cetera to get these people to them. Have you been able to maybe form a committee to do that?

I also concur with the honourable Minister's comments with respect to the EBayShop issue. We should condemn it outright now. Unfortunately, Sir, we, as Fijians, are quite gullible when these things happen and I know for a fact that civil servants, the Police Force, military people and educated people have actually been stunned with this and the number is quite large.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I still think that it needs to be a whole lot more education on it, but the question is, will you or have you already put something in place with respect to getting the

financial literacy and training that is needed for these people to get out in the workforce? I know the Ministry of Trade has a lot of avenues with respect to that.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Member. As the former Minister for Trade, I know you would have had collaborations with the Ministry. We are continuing with that good work. I am grateful to the Trade Officers at the Ministry of Trade who come to all our activities that they work with our Department of Women on exactly that.

But having said that, honourable Member, this is something that we, as Ministers or as Government or as Members, need to perhaps increase our capacity in terms of project proposals, engaging the private sector, working together through the Ministry for Trade and getting their skills (I know they have met with Investment Fiji and trade officers where they can increase the capacity of our people; women especially to be able to put together project proposals, so that we as the Ministry can then take it to our development partners. That is a skill in itself and I am hopeful that we will continue that work and I am very grateful for the Ministry for Trade for working with us.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for her reply to that question. Just a suggestion before I ask my supplementary question in terms of doing your scoping for various trainings and courses that are available for single mums, in terms of focusing on HART and various homes and various women organisation, can I suggest that you just increase your scoping to the various communities and settlements that are available because there are more that live within these communities and settlements within the urban areas and the rural areas as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are focusing on women and I thank the honourable Minister for focusing on single mums. Just to ask whether there are avenues as well out there for single dads in terms of social protection?

MR. SPEAKER.- That was a lengthy one, honourable Bia. First of all, you began with that suggestion, then you went to the women, and now you end up with single men. The question is directed towards the Ministry of Women. Your question is on single men.

HON. A. BIA.- Single dads, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the suggestion about working with the communities widely. As I have said, this is a pilot project, Why the HART community was approached, even though we consulted widely, was because of their ability to provide child care for the mums so that they can attend the course. That was the very big part of our scoping. I would then hope to appeal to settlements where the mums or the community will come together and be able to provide that help so that they can attend courses. But I thank you and I note your suggestion.

In terms of the single men, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact ...

HON. K.K. LAL.- Single dads.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Single dads, yes, same thing?

MR. SPEAKER.- That goes to another Ministry.

(Laughter)

HON. K.K. LAL.- Social protection.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- So, single dads, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact the suggestion to approach it was an appeal from a single dad at the PRB flat in Nabua, that triggered discussions with the PRB and the honourable Minister for Housing. He has five children, he was on his own and he had to leave his work to look after his children during COVID. It wrapped up in a thousand of dollars in terms of PRB rental arrears. But this is something we look at all of them, they are entitled of course to apply for the Family Assistance Scheme, just as single mothers do.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Social Welfare increment of 25 percent that the honourable Minister is talking about is not fully reflected in the payments. Those who are supposed to receive \$125 some of them are receiving only \$115. I have received some complaints from the senior citizens, we have registered the complaint with the Nasinu Welfare Office.

I understand because the Budget was implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2023 but then again this month, Sir, some of them who were supposed to receive \$125 have just received \$115. While I am speaking on that, Sir, just to let the honourable Minister know that those who are getting \$115 are only able to withdraw \$110 and those are receiving \$125 are only able to receive \$120 due to this ATM provisions where they cannot receive the \$5. My question, Sir, when is this going to be rectified?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I will ask the honourable Member to, please, write in formally so that we can act on it. Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There are cases.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I do not think that is correct.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Women for the answer she has given. I would like to ask something with regards to the nutrition bit of babies if we are talking about single mothers and working mothers, though we are actually promote from Ministry of Health that breastfeeding is best for the babies but most of the time we are not able to do so, especially with working mothers and even single mothers who are working.

If you look at the price even though on the price control, a tin of SMA is around S22, S26 is ranging from \$38 to \$45 which is quite massive. Is the Ministry actually looking at subsidising these formula somehow or the other, or are there any talks in place to give some tax incentive to one of the companies in Fiji who can actually manufacture so that this cost can go down because nutrition for babies at a very tender age is very important?

MR. SPEAKER.- Before you reply honourable Minister, you look at the rest of the questions has changed, a single mother to single dad and now we are talking about breast feeding. This is all...

HON. F.S. KOYA.- All connected!!

MR. SPEAKER.- All connected?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is a new question.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think we need to address the issues that were raised earlier on, which is the thrust of the question, it is do with single mothers. Let us keep it at that.



HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister provided a comprehensive answer, which is why a lot of questions developed around it. My question will be very brief. Will the Government consider the review of national minimum wage? It is good that you are encouraging single mums and women to be educated and come back to the employment sector.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an advocate for the national minimum wage, I think there is always room for improvement and certainly we will consider that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, my plea is, please confine the question to the thrust of the first question and let us keep it at that, otherwise we are going around in circles here. We are even going to men breastfeeding the children or something.

Update – 4<sup>th</sup> Review of Fiji's Trade Policy  
(Question No. 118/2023)

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

Can the Deputy Prime Minister and honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications provide an update on the 4<sup>th</sup> Review of Fiji's Trade Policy at the World Trade Organization that took place from 19th July to 21st July, 2023 in Geneva?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps just very briefly before I begin my answer, I hope the other side of Parliament starts getting what we have been talking on this side of Parliament, which is, that there is new democracy in this country now. In the old Parliament, they would never have the opportunity and you had been so tolerant, and I think they owe you ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ... some gratitude. On behalf of this side of Parliament and for the people of Fiji, the other side of Parliament will agree with us that there is new democracy in this country, real democracy in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to answer the question. I rise to provide an update on the Fiji's recent engagement in the fourth review of our trade policy at the World Trade Organization (WTO). I wish to extend my gratitude to the former Minister, who was part of the process from the beginning, and it shows what we were able to achieve in Geneva this year.

From 19<sup>th</sup> July to 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2023, Fiji actively participated in the fourth review of our Trade Policy at the WTO. The review process played a pivotal role in enabling us to thoroughly assess the impact of our trade policies, engage in constructive dialogue with our trading partners and deliberate on the necessary adjustments to enhance our trade strategy further.

The trade reviews are mandated as an exercise stemming from the Marrakesh Agreement that established the WTO. This review serves to enhance transparency and understanding of countries' trade policies and practices and enable multilateral assessments of how the WTO member policies affect the world trading system. It is crucial to clarify that this is not an illegal scrutiny, but rather, a constructive stocktake aimed at fostering a better understanding and providing recommendations for improvement.

The frequency of this review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, varies according to country size and for Fiji our trade policies undergo review every six years at the WTO. Trade Policy Reviews process involves two essential documents - our policy statement by the Government under review and a detailed independent report authored by the WTO Secretariat.

The journey towards Fiji's 4<sup>th</sup> Trade Policy Review began in July 2022. To prepare the WTO Secretariat Report, we work diligently to provide timely information to the Secretariat, with assistance of our stakeholders. Additionally, a scoping mission to Fiji was conducted by the Secretariat in March 2023 to finalise the report. The Ministry also coordinated consultations with relevant agencies and stakeholders to prepare Fiji's policy statement. Once these reports were compiled, they were circulated to all WTO members for submission or written questions.

Fiji then had to respond to the questions in advance of the Trade Policy Review at the WTO headquarters in July. Fiji received over 169 written advance questions from various WTO members demonstrating the global communities' keen interest in our trade policies. We are pleased to have provided comprehensive and well considered answers to these questions both in writing and during the Trade Policy Review session.

I have to say Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we did answer all the questions and I would just like to thank the Ministry officials who worked very hard to ensure that we projected a very good image of our country at the WTO. During the Trade Review Policy session Fiji received overwhelming support and recommendations from numerous WTO countries such as Barbados, Vanuatu, Ecuador, Timor-Leste, Samoa, Indonesia, Kenya, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Mauritius, Japan, Canada, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia, United States, Singapore, European Union, China, Costa Rica, Brazil and South Korea.

These wide-ranging support underscores Fiji's small but robust presence on the global trade stage. Fiji's significant contributions to the WTO did not go unnoticed Mr. Speaker, Sir. The contributions on the Fisheries Agreement were particularly highlighted and acknowledged by all members underscoring our commitment to the Blue Pacific Ocean, blue oceans, the conservation of oceans and sustainable fisheries management.

In this regard the ratification of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies yesterday will actually do a lot to confirm our stature as a leader in this area. In the realm of environmental sustainability Fiji's role as co-chair of the plastics dialogue received high praise as we facilitated discussions on plastic pollution and promoted environmentally sustainable plastic trading. Furthermore, Fiji's decision to lower tariffs on meat imports was warmly welcomed by WTO members demonstrating our commitments to open and accessible trade environments.

Given Fiji's active role in the WTO Fiji was also invited to join a number of plurilateral negotiations taking place in the margins of the WTO. These include services, domestic regulations and e-commerce. Australia has also invited Fiji to join the Care and Needs Scale (CANS) group which lobbies against agricultural subsidy.

Trade has long been the lifeblood of Fiji's development Mr. Speaker, Sir, deeply engrained in the very fabric of our society. It is through trade that we have expanded our horizon, open new opportunities and fostered innovation. Our journey towards economic progress has been fundamentally linked to our ability to connect with the world and showcase the richness of our culture and its produce or products.

The WTO plays a critical role in this endeavour providing a platform for a rules based, transparent and equitable global trading system. As a small island nation, Fiji acknowledges the

importance of the WTO in ensuring that all nations regardless of their size, but can participate in international trade on fair and just terms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the WTO Secretariat for their tireless efforts in producing the comprehensive report that served as a cornerstone of our trade policy review in Geneva.

I would also like to thank His Excellency, Mr. George Mina of Australia who is the WTO Ambassador for Australia who served in his role as the Discussant for Fiji's Trade Policy Review.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji remains committed to the principles of fair and open trade and we will continue to work closely with our global partners through the WTO to strengthen our trade policies for the benefit of Fiji and its people.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the honourable Deputy Prime Minister that we are also seeing contradicting scenarios of the so-called new democracy.

In his answer, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the question he stated about Conservation of Oceans something that is in the heart of the Marrakesh Agreement, Conservation of Oceans.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April, he moved the motion in here about the protection of our oceans. So, if the honourable Deputy Prime Minister can tell us and tell the House where is Fiji's official position on the Conservation of Oceans?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, sometimes some of us have hearing issues. You have just been talking about supplementary question being related to the ...

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- You mentioned it in your answer.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is a new question.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- In democracy.

HON. J. USAMATE.- No answers.

MR. SPEAKER.- Have been hearing you mentioning Japan all the time, honourable Ketan Lal. What has that to do with this?

HON. MEMBER.- Very cheeky.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hey, who is cheeky. That is unparliamentary language.

MR. SPEAKER.- You cannot raise a Point of Order because I will just be inviting honourable Ketan on that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I think what honourable Usamate was about to say was that, I think sometimes we need to treat our younger MPs as MPs.

HON. J. USAMATE.- They are honourable Members.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Members, be that as it may, ....

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- We will talk about ...

MR. SPEAKER.- No running commentary.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I commend the honourable Minister because I know that the review was some 111 odd pages of report. So, trying to condense it into a 10 minute answer was actually quite difficult. I have like a 111 questions to ask but something that I can speak to him about. Just one question, honourable Minister, in light of the review that has taken place this is obviously guided by the fact that Marrakesh Agreement has asked that periodically your trade policy be reviewed.

The Initial Fijian Trade Policy Framework was set up in 2015 sort of had a 10 year lifespan. We are about almost less than 24 months may be away from that expiry. Will you be going through another exercise to come up with the new Trade Policy Framework bearing in mind the recommendations that have come out of the actual Trade Policy Review by the WTO?

There are quite a few things that we need to do in terms of intellectual property rights and we are talking about trips and trips waiver, et cetera and all of those things. There are many new things that have been made available to Fijians and are now part of our landscape. So, my question really is that to incorporate all of that will we be doing another exercise in terms of getting a newer Trade Policy Framework sooner rather than later, Sir?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I thank honourable Koya for that question. Yes, absolutely when I first came in, I saw the documents from the last Trade Framework and one of my first questions was, why can we not update it now when there are suggestions from the technocrats which is a wise one? Let us focus first on delivering on the TPR in Geneva and after all the comments are received, we can then progress on the framework reviewing and issuing a new document. That is in the pipeline, we will be starting work on that soon.

Construction/Extension of Nayavu Health Centre  
(Question No. 119/2023)

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the Ministry's plans for the construction and extension of Nayavu Health Centre?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his Oral Question. Sir, the Nayavu Health Centre in Wainibuka is one few of the health facilities around the country that the Ministry is working on for infrastructural improvement. The current clinic has aged through the years and its ongoing renovations together with the current structures needed.

Sir, in 2020, Government then, through the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) constructed a building beside the current health clinic at a cost of \$576,580. The brand new building was intended to be staff quarters and has been occupied recently by clinical staff working at the health centre.

However, upon reviewing the priorities for the health services at Nayavu, we were given that there are adequate housing still in place and the Ministry is planning to repurpose the new building to house some health services that are currently provided from the health clinic. Those health services will be:

- General Outpatients Department (GOPD);
- Specialist Outpatients Department (SOPD);
- Doctor's Consultation Room; and
- Holding beds for short term patient observation.

Prior to this, we will re-house the staff living in the new building and the nearby staff quarters and we will duly inform the general public whilst we have finalised the new arrangements for the health services from the health centre.

In addition to this, I would like to also acknowledge the continuous support from our development partners, both multi-lateral, unilateral in assisting the Ministry in terms of improving the infrastructure. One in particular that is assisting the Nayavu Health Centre facility is under KOICA funded SHAPE Projects (Strengthening Health Adaptation Project).

Under the SHAPE Project, we have identified to do extension of the waiting area, polarisation of the facility and other improvements in the wash facilities as well. Those are earmarked for Nayavu Health Centre and not only that, the Ministry is also looking at other facilities.

Just to add on to that, the KOICA is looking also into 19 other facilities, a total of 20 with Nayavu being one of them.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Minister for Health for what he had mentioned of Nayavu Health Centre. I think the people from Wainibuka and parts of Ra will benefit from the new standard of health service in Nayavu in years to come.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with relation to the extension of the Nayavu Health Centre, will that also mean that the scope or the status of the health centre will be increased because I know in some of these health centres they always have a problem? Whenever there is a problem at Korovou, the staff get pulled out and they are put into Korovou. I am just wondering about the staffing structure, will that also be improved and also the level of service that will be provided there.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the extension is for the scope of the infrastructure, but the Health Centre level itself is standard to cater for that amount of population.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nayavu Health Centre looks after Rokovuaka on the border of Ra, Naveicovatu on the border of Wainibuka and Nakida in Naitasiri and also Soa. So the population has grown over the years and also with the infrastructure development in terms of road, electricity and connectivity. There is also a lot of accidents along that road. My question to the honourable Minister, will the Ministry consider the introduction of the new medical services like laboratory, dental, x-ray and mortuary at the Nayavu Health Centre due to the increase in population? Will the honourable Minister consider the introduction of new services together with the expansion of the infrastructure at Nayavu Health Centre?

MR. SPEAKER.- That is an interesting request coming now. They asked for the scope, the extension, now they want four mortuaries. It is a great expectation.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Ravunawa for his supplementary question. As I had mentioned, one of the new buildings done in 2020 are repurposing it to cater for clinical services. For the new building if you have been there, the road goes straight in front of it and there is a small round about in front. We are trying to utilise that space for clinical services and as you mentioned, it is along the highway at an accident prone area, we can utilise that area for emergency as well. However, at the moment the standard is, as I had

mentioned before, if we are to increase that, then we have to involve other speciality in that area, then we have to improve and raise the standard of that health facility.

In terms of the mortuary, as I was talking with honourable Rokomatu, it has been raised a couple of times from that area in Wainibuka. We have also identified the need that between Rakiraki and Korovou, there is nothing in between those areas. So, we will be taking that into consideration probably in the next financial year.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 12.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members just before we continue, I would like to show you the yellow and red cards, for some have been calling for the yellow card. It is good that the Secretariat has prepared this, and it is now ready.

(Laughter)

I hope I would not be like the referee that ref the game against our team, but I hope to be impartial. It is just get some sense of direction in how we conduct ourselves honourably in this House. This will be the intermediary between the Privileges Committee so at least you have some process in between as the yellow and if that continues then it becomes red and then the Privileges Committee can sit in and decide. I think it will make it easy for them because right now I have been getting a few letters of complaints and it is quite hard. And for that respect we had long meetings with the Secretariat and we even sought the views of the Solicitor-General to help us because everything has to be seen to be transparent and legally done as well.

Progress of Land Development for Informal Settlements  
(Question No. 120/2023)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament on the status of land development works in progress to formalise informal settlements?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for the question placed before the august Parliament this afternoon. Before I provide my Parliamentary response this afternoon, please, allow me to express my wishes.

First, I would like to join the former speakers as well as honourable Members who have expressed their best wishes to our humble Prime Minister on his special day today as well as the honourable Bilitavu on his birthday today.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are they getting younger?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to congratulate and express my best wishes to the Fiji Water Flying Fijians Rugby Team. The Captain of the team is from the province of Serua so as a neighbouring province, I congratulate them for a job well done in their last game against Wales, even though they fell short. But I think they really warmed our hearts after that game and also wish them the best in their next game against Australia. I know they are going to beat Australia in their second game.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- I also thank the honourable Members who have also shown their support placing the Fiji Rugby Union pins as well as from the Municipal Councils throughout the country, they also showed their support by putting up the national flag just to support our national rugby team.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the formalisation of informal settlements is a crucial endeavour towards achieving sustainable outcomes. It involves improving the living conditions, infrastructure and services in these settlements to provide their residents with secure and dignified living conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently the Ministry of Housing and Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme is an *in situ* capital programme focused on improving livelihoods for people living in informal settlements across our nation. It comes to the Ministry as a total of 48 development leases, out of which 44 are located on *iTaukei* land and four on State land. These development leases are spread throughout Fiji with 13 settlements located in the Central Division, 14 settlements in the Northern Division and 21 settlements in the Western Division. The acquisition of these development leases started from 2012 and I thank my predecessors for this great initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, three out of 48 informal settlements, they are Cuvu in Nadroga, Ledrusasa in Nadi and Waidamudamu in Nausori have had their upgrades completed in 2022. These settlements are now in the process for lot allocation. Additionally, four informal settlements are presently in construction phase and these are in Sakoca in Nasinu which comprise of 174 households, Tavela in Nadi with 68 households and recently Field 4 of Lautoka which is around 77 households as well as Tore in Lautoka too with 59 households. The total estimated cost of upgrade in these settlements is around \$20.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, completion of preparatory work includes topographic surveys, preparation of scheme plans, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), geotech surveys and engineering plans are completed allowing the commencement of constructions works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, engineering plans for five informal settlements have recently been approved and these are Lovu Seaside, Nabare and Delaisaweni informal settlements in Lautoka, Valewaquyaya Settlement in Ba and Vunika in Labasa. Additionally, Caubati and Wakanisila Settlements in Nasinu, Sasawira Settlement in Nausori and Nadonumai in Lami are earmarked to complete their engineering plans by end of this financial year. The total estimated cost for the upgrade of these settlements is around \$75 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, four settlements are currently in scheme plan phase which is planned to be also completed in this financial year. The first one is Tukutora in Lautoka, Vunivau A and Vunivau B in Labasa and Qauia in Lami.

There are five settlements that will be commencing preparation phase with consultants recently awarded, these includes River Road in Nasinu, Veivauceva in Nasinu, Vatia settlement in Siberia, Delaimasimasi in Lautoka and Uluisila in Sigatoka. Hence, all these 25 Settlements are earmarked to be formalised for the next six years subject to budget allocation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the remaining 23 informal settlements out of the 48 are in preliminary phases to begin preparatory works by 2026. The preliminary phase includes preparation of bidding documents for the tender to select a Consultant to undertake the preparation work. Furthermore, the Ministry also pays the lease premiums and yearly rentals for the 44 development leases in *iTaukei*. A total of \$4.1 million in premium have been paid in addition to \$0.9 million in yearly rentals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also highlight that the Ministry of Housing is also working in exploring options to include the improvement of housing conditions such as ways in which existing homes can be renovated, construction of new housing units and providing financial support to residents who are not eligible for home loan to upgrade their homes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Coalition Government is ensuring that the formalising work is not completed after upgrading but guaranteed homes are also improved to meet the appropriate standards for families and that is safe and resilient.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to ask the honourable Minister if he can also update Parliament on any programmes that complement the informal settlements upgrade programme?



HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, parallel to the informal settlements upgrading project that is undertaken by the Ministry, we also has two on-going partner pilot projects that will assist to identify new approaches and best practices for the upgrade and development of informal settlements in Fiji. These two projects are the Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements (FRIS) as well as Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environments commonly known as RISE. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also thankful to our development partners, the New Zealand Government as well as UN-Habitat for supporting these projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, RISE in Fiji involves 12 informal settlement sites. The project will be carried out in two phases with six sites in each phase. The successful implementation of the RISE programme will enable approximately 3,600 Fijians living in these 12 project sites to recycle their wastewater, harvest rain water, create green space for food cultivation, water cleansing, restore waterways to reduce vulnerability to flooding and strengthen climate resilience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, concurrently the Fiji Resilient Informal Settlement Programme is underway with 16 vulnerable families in informal settlements across four urban areas in Lautoka, Sigatoka, Nadi and Lami have been identified. The initial capital works under this project is expected to commence around November to December this year. Upon completion of these projects, it is going to benefit a total of 8,231 families with improved resilience to climate change effects.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Minister for his detailed response which I truly appreciate. In new Fiji, the cost of living has skyrocketed, even the cost of doing business has increased. Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament whether the cost of land development has increased as a result of 15 percent VAT?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, even though it is not directed to the question but I will try and provide some response.

The cost of land development is an issue that is not only related to VAT, it has other components that lead to the increase in development costs, especially in land development. It would not be right to say that it is only related to VAT. There are other factors apart from VAT that can lead to development costs. For example, if subdivision is held and if you look at the cost of consultancy, it has escalated over the past 10 years, as well as development costs associated to the consultancy fees is a good example, and these factors actually lead up to increased development costs around the country.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for providing an update on the formalisation of informal settlements. My question is, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament whether the Government will provide assistance to tenants if the current tenants are displaced from their settlements?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, may I respond to the question. For the last three weeks, I have been visited by two families who have been evicted from a settlement in Vatuwaqa and it is fortunate that we have been able to assist these families. I can assure them now that they are going to relocate them to two sites that we have already identified for them. We have a system in place to assist families that have been evicted or have been asked to relocate.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, honourable Kirpal has spoken and also written to say that the statement by the honourable Minister for Agriculture in the morning, right down to the details of the big bulls that he brought from Australia, has satisfied him, so his question will now be omitted from the Order Paper. We will now move on to the next Oral Question.

(Question No. 121/2023 withdrawn)

Promotion of Digital Literacy  
(Question No.122/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the initiatives that the Ministry has undertaken to promote digital literacy and ensure that students have access to technology for remote learning, especially in light of recent disruptions to traditional education due to the pandemic?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker Sir, may I, first of all, seek your indulgence to unreservedly correct a statement I made yesterday, that was rebutted by honourable Hem Chand. Sir, my good friend, honourable Hem Chand, took up the acting head of HR in the Ministry of Education from January 2020. Prior to that promotional appointment, he held the position of Director Primary Education. He may have knowledge of all the appointments including Head of School and I leave it to his conscience of all the appointments that was made during his term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to take this time to sincerely apologise to his good wife if my statement yesterday may have brought harm upon her or her professional reputation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of that, I promise to be more careful in the future with the information provided by staff of the Ministry of Education to be uttered in this august Parliament. Preferably, I would like to stay away from personal attack and for that, I sincerely regret any lowering of standards according to this august Parliament. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and honourable Members of this Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for that brave position you have taken. Really, honourable Members, you do not have to personalise things. I want to implore that to each and every one of you. You may argue as hard as you like in the Chambers, but do not personalise anything and when you leave the Chambers, that is the end of it. You go as colleagues down to the tea room or where we have our meals and then we share the same table and discuss issues that we can play a part in solving. I thank you for that brave effort, honourable Minister.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the question by the honourable Member, the COVID-19 pandemic has, indeed, disrupted traditional education for our children. This causes a shift towards remote learning and to ensure that students have access to technology and promote digital literacy. There were several initiatives that should have been taken, which have not been done and the Ministry of Education is now working hard to get this platform off the ground for all schools in Fiji. It is a huge target, given the intent to provide equitable learning for all our children and the challenges of our geographical locations especially for schools in the rural and maritime zones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education is engaged in various initiatives aimed to ensure that students have access to online learning, through technology which will allow them to engage in effective remote learning. By promoting digital literacy, educators and policy makers strive to equip students with essential skills for the future while minimizing educational disruptions during crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic. The future will demand that our learning platforms are ready for any evolving demands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the lessons learnt so far, the Ministry of Education has engaged a number of platforms to boost e-learning and these include:

1. The “I am digital” initiative that educates students on online safety and this is being carried out in partnership with Save the Children Fiji, engaging student leadership bodies which has been piloted in 10 schools so far.
2. Another exciting platform is the "Girls in ICT training project”, which was conducted this year in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Communications.
3. Another initiative that is being undertaken by the Ministry of Education (MOE) with the University of the South Pacific is the development of 1500 Open Education Resources (OER) for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects. This is a government initiative in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
4. MOE is also developing an audio-visual studio with relevant stakeholders. We thank the Ministry of Finance for the budget of \$100,000 in this financial year which has been allocated for this project. The studio will include six recording rooms for the following:
  - (a) school broadcasting programmes;
  - (b) production of education channel content;
  - (c) airing of education channel lessons;
  - (d) live lessons (distance learning) for our rural, remote and maritime schools; and
  - (e) airing of recorded lessons.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Government is working to improve the Learning Management System which is currently in place and available through the Government ITC Services, and this will support the existing digital learning platforms being used in Early Childhood Education (ECE) up to Year 13 level for all schools in Fiji, to become more interactive.

On support services made available through device learning, MOE is currently having discussions with stakeholders in having an end to end solution for this initiative. Students will be able to have devices with educational resources and platforms for their personal learning.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry to date has increased E-learning connectivity to schools, on an average of 57 percent throughout Fiji. Following the Ministry’s continued audits to access the current status in Fiji, the MOE is pushing for an increase in budget in the next financial year, so we can reach 100 percent connectivity so those children from rural, remote and maritime areas will be able to browse the web and use technology very different from what most of us had back in the early days. This requires a collaboration with internet service providers and it is something that the Ministry of Education is pushing to ensure that we are able to address the E-learning shortfalls currently existing, due to internet connectivity issues.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Could you please update on education via the Walesi platform?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry of Education is progressively working on available existing platforms like the -

- Web-based learning hub in partnership with Telecom Fiji limited.
- School broadcast programs.
- Education Channel (Walesi). For this term external examination revision lessons will be aired from 5pm to 10pm in the afternoon and evening.

Also, we have the Ministry of Education Moodle for Heads of Schools and teacher online training. This is an MOE *talanoa* forum for teachers and sharing of resources. We also have the web-based learning hub. This is a Fiji Open Education Resource done in partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and provides an open web learning hub where specific subjects can be accessed for learning purposes.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. Honourable Minister, you spoke about handing over the possibility or you forecasted to hand over devices to the students. Now that mitigates inequality, but to access devices you need data connection as well, so how would you monitor data misuse, and the misuse of these digital learning devices. If this would just be temporary for the period they would be in the schools and after that they probably would have to return, how would you monitor the misuse of data provided or the devices provided to the students and if it is given until that timeframe when they are in school.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, probably the question is asking about the challenges that we are confronted with as a Ministry of Education. One of the challenges that has been identified is the lack of resources with students, and also the connectivity to power supply. We also have lack of training with teachers and students and even parents who are necessary for the support system and ensuring such platforms are in workable arrangements.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly I would like to thank the honourable Minister for apologising for what he said yesterday. In fact, my wife was very disturbed yesterday, so thank you honourable Minister for that. My question to you is, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament whether teacher training institutions have incorporated digital training in their course?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his supplementary question. This is part of the items that will be dealt with in the National Education Summit that will be convened next week.

MR. SPEAKER.- That brings us to the end of the Oral Questions. Before you proceed to the Written Question, honourable Members may I remind each and every one of us about the line of sight.

When the honourable Minister for Education was on the floor, hopefully honourable Minister for Sugar, could have gone the other way around to take your seat rather than trying to come across this line sight from the Mr. Speaker, to whoever is on the floor. I say this out of respect because that is the kind of decorum that we observe and that we nurture very much in this Parliament. It might affect you as you stand and wait but that is the rule of Parliament and I hope this reminder will serve us well.

### Written Questions

#### Labour Recruitment Firms (Question No.123/2023)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) the number of overseas labour recruitment firms registered and operating in Fiji in respect of recruiting seasonal or long-term labour for Fiji or overseas;

- (b) the number of seasonal or long-term labourers who went away from Fiji to work overseas in the last 12 months and their respective country destinations;
- (c) the number of seasonal or long-term labourers who came to work in Fiji in the last 12 months and their nationalities; and
- (d) the number of work permits declined for seasonal or long-term labour in Fiji?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

List of LTA Projects and Programmes  
(Question No.124/2023)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government upon notice:

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

- (a) a detailed breakdown of the list of projects and programmes that will be implemented to utilise the budget of the Land Transport Authority 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 under Standing Order 45(3).

List of MSAF Projects and Programmes  
(Question No.125/2023)

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

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

- (a) a detailed breakdown of the list of projects and programmes that will be implemented to utilise the budget of the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji 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).

**2023 PARLIAMENT SITTING CALENDAR – AMENDMENT OF**

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

That Parliament approves the amended Sitting Calendar as previously circulated.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, as all

honourable Members would know that Parliament had already passed the Sitting Calendar for 2023 during the Sitting of Parliament earlier in the year, as well as an amendment during the July Sitting of Parliament after deliberations at the Business Committee.

As has been the practice that the Business Committee had agreed that should there be a dire need to re-adjust some of the sittings that this would be subsequently tabled in Parliament for endorsement. So, in essence, Mr. Speaker, this motion is seeking Parliament's approval to allow flexibilities for two requests:

1. The first is for a deferment of the second week of Sitting for this September Sitting to another time to be decided later. The request needs the endorsement of the House to enable the Honourable Prime Minister to attend and participate at the United Nations General Assembly in New York.
2. The second amendment to the Sitting Calendar, Mr. Speaker is in the November Sitting and that is to bring the second week of sitting of Parliament that was earlier scheduled for the week of 27<sup>th</sup> November to the 1<sup>st</sup> December to be brought forward to the week of the 14<sup>th</sup> November to 17<sup>th</sup> November.

The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is to allow the honourable Prime Minister and the Fiji Government delegation upon the invite of the honourable Prime Minister to attend the invitation of the COP Meeting in Dubai. This is an important meeting, Mr. Speaker as you would know, Climate Change affects the Pacific Island States, especially our vulnerability as small Island States to the devastating power of natural disasters, tropical cyclones, floods, etc and we are amongst the most susceptible and expose to Climate Change impacts.

In this regard, Mr Speaker Sir, given the salient points that I have put to the floor of this House, I do seek the indulgence of the Members to support this motion and I commend this motion before Parliament to prove the proposed amendments to the sitting week as per the new calendar that is in front of all Members today. I thank you for the support of the Members of the Business Committee that have agreed to it so we hope that Parliament will do the same.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and before I offer the floor I have a list of speakers that have been identified by the honourable Whips and for the Government, it is the honourable Prime Minister that would like to take the floor.

For the Opposition, it is the honourable Hem Chand, honourable Ketan Lal and to be rounded off by honourable Koya so I will now offer the floor to the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to support this motion to amend the Sitting Calendar that have been circulated to us because of some obligations that particularly in my case, I did not plan on the United Nations General Assembly that had come up later in our term and after the original sitting plan had been formulated.

Secondly, in a later sitting where both I and the honourable Leader of the Opposition will be away for the COP Conference and we have also had to ask for those changes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament for responding to some of these urgent calls from the Cabinet, particularly, from me as the Prime Minister. I also thank Parliament, honourable Members and you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for favourably considering these late requests. With those, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to share my views on the motion before Parliament. It is imperative to highlight the potential consequences of reducing the number of sitting weeks in a parliamentary calendar. While certain benefits may be sought through this approach, it is crucial to carefully assess the negative impacts that such measures may have on democratic processes, representation and effective governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the beginning of each year, before the commencement of the new Parliament session, the Government releases the sitting calendar, which is done after careful planning. The Parliament Sitting Calendar guides the honourable Members of Parliament to develop their own personal calendar so that Members of Parliament can also attend to their delegated duties. The parliamentary sitting calendar is a great tool, not just for Members of Parliament, but also for anyone who interacts with the honourable Members of Parliament and those who take interest in politics. People look forward to Parliament Sitting.

A reduced number of sitting weeks in the parliamentary calendar can impede the vital democratic principle of accountability. We were supposed to have two weeks of Parliament sitting in July and September, but it had been reduced to one week. The total sitting days, which was planned at the beginning of the year, was 49 days and now it has been reduced to 33 days. That means, the sitting days have been reduced by 6 days, which is equivalent to more than three weeks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not understand the motives behind the reduction in the sitting days. I suggest that honourable Ministers give priority to Parliament sitting, and where possible, delegate technical staff from the Ministry to attend overseas meetings and engagements. Parliament sitting days should not be compromised because Parliament has very important roles where important issues are debated, Government spending is discussed, laws are made and amended and Opposition examines and challenges the work of the Government through questioning and debating. With these words, I do not support the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Hem Chand?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my apologies, I support the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- After having heard you in your first comment, I wanted to state clearly in this august Parliament that it took a lot of us in the Business Committee to agree to the very issues that you have raised here. It is lucky that we have the honourable Leader of the Opposition, together with honourable Koya and honourable Usamate, who had been in the Cabinet Office for a very long time. They gave their superb advice that the month of September is a definite for the UN. If we take this to the members of our staff, we will just be passing the buck here. It stops with us here and when a request comes from the honourable Prime Minister, we have to accommodate that.

In so doing, we reluctantly agreed to this change of the timetable because we are also used to something that we have agreed that sticks but, again, nothing is set in stone here. It is not a blueprint calendar because it is subject to change. When issue arises to make changes, we will just have to address it head-on and what I would like to share with you, honourable Members, was the very thing that we discussed in the Business Committee. It took a while to get an agreement, especially with your Whip. Honourable Maharaj is always sounding out the very thing that you said honourable Chand - 2 weeks, the number of sittings in a year - is all part of the plan from January when this comes out, but we have changed this.

This has been changing and we bear your indulgence in that, but we have been guided by the Leader of the Opposition just to ensure, through his advice, that we have taken on board the Leader of the Government in Parliament to advise the honourable Prime Minister that September is a “no

go” area for us because that is when the United Nations sits.

Now, we have heard from the honourable Prime Minister that he will be going to Dubai again, that has just been finalised too and apart from that, the other meetings together with the honourable Leader of the Opposition. Please, bear with us on that, honourable Member.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I wish to withdraw my opportunity to speak as you have already explained the reasons behind these things.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir, a very short contribution. Honourable Prime Minister, we do understand very well with respect the commitments that you have and also with respect to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

What the Parliament must also know is that the UNGA meeting is actually set for a particular time always is the last week in September. I urge the honourable Members of the other side of Parliament to ask their staff to pull up their socks because I think the honourable Leader of the Opposition had actually warned everyone earlier that that week is dedicated for UNGA and nothing was done about it.

It came at a later stage, we understand that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why we are agreeing to it. But I think sometimes we do not (speaking for both sides) listen and at times when you are offered good advice from us, please, listen because that is important. It is about Fiji at the UNGA, it is about Fiji at the Climate Conference and I think that is very, very important. I think someone dropped their lunchbox, obviously, at the Ministry and that is not anything bad with respect to the honourable Prime Minister, it is someone at the office that did not actually do their job properly.

Having said that, Sir, I think enough has been said with respect to the number of days but just the last point, Sir, next time, I think the request was made from the government with respect to having two weeks, et cetera, we have canvassed all of that at the Business Committee. It is a good idea that we have the two weeks, maybe for the next year’s Calendar which might come up sooner rather than later. At end of the day, we need to ensure that we get our calendar right because travelling is important. We have lost quite a number of days in Parliament. I know Mr. Speaker, Sir has said, look, utilise it well, the Committee has considered et cetera, all of that is there.

Please, Sir, ask the staff to ensure that the honourable Prime Minister’s calendar is correct right at the start of the year.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Members for your contribution and I especially thank our Members from the Opposition for supporting this motion and also for withdrawing contributions upon what you have shared, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you for that.

We take note of the improvements that need to be made in terms of setting the next Parliamentary Calendar. I will look forward to the Business Committee of having certainly a more robust and mutual exchanges for the next Sitting Calendar whether two weeks is suited or whether one week and more frequently that is something we are certainly always open to and we look forward to that in the setting of the next Calendar. I want to thank honourable Members for supporting the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, in addition to what has been said, I forgot to mention what was raised by the honourable Leader of Opposition in the Business Committee and that is for us to do a late booking in that month at the United Nations in New York. The hotel rates are really sky high. I think the previous Government paid a price for that when they summoned him to attend



and the rate that they paid was about \$14,000 or something just for those few days of meeting at the United Nations, so it is a very costly and expensive thing.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament agrees to the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission by the Government to facilitate open and free engagement in truth telling and confront fears in view of conflicting statements and utterances regarding motives behind the political upheavals so that closure and healing for Fiji is achieved and permanently put to rest this unfortunate and turbulent chapter of our independent history.

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

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of this august Parliament and people of our beloved nation; *ni sa bula vinaka saka, sab ko mera pranam.*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is long awaited. Our honourable Prime Minister has promised the setting up of this all-important Commission for very good reasons as I tried to articulate this in this motion.

I am grateful and honoured that I have been asked by the honourable Prime Minister and the Coalition Government to move this motion in the hope that it may become a significant step towards our national building. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is our hope that the Coalition Government's task of rebuilding Fiji together for our future will reach greater heights after the work of this Commission.

National Prayer and Reconciliation Programme initiated by the President of the Methodist Church during the Girit Commemoration and participation of leaders and various faith groups in the event indicate that our people are ready for a healing process.

Mr. Speaker, all three Parties in the Coalition Government are firm in their commitment to see to their establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is long overdue, Sir, but it is better late than never. Some may ask whether this is the time for it. Some may say we should focus on cost of living and on better public services, and I understand that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know from many long years of personal engagement with our people, there are a lot of people that are hurting. There are many unresolved issues that need closure. Can we be a prosperous society if we live in fear and insecurity, if we do not trust our neighbours and carry wounded hearts, Mr. Speaker?

Our nation has been plagued by political upheaval since 1987. Officially, we have had four *coups* including that of 2000 and 2006. But other events have also caused pain and misery to many. Each time we recovered and tried to move forward with the hope that political upheaval should become a thing of the past, sometimes we seem to make progress. The creation of the 1997 Constitution was a time when all sides of this House came together under the leadership of the man who was then and is

again now our Prime Minister together with the late Justice Jai Ram Reddy. The House voted unanimously for a new form of government and new ways of leadership. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this was not to last but this is not a time to dwell on that issue.

Mr. Speaker, the sad events which have plagued our history themselves pass into history and after then, each time our economy has recovered. Sometimes we create new legal regime and we all try to move forward but we are also avoiding some hard truths, we are not looking deep inside ourselves to learn the lessons of the past. It is easier to look away from the painful events and perhaps pretend that they did not happen but constant echoes of divide, narratives of the past remind us that there are deep rooted wounds in many hearts unable to heal.

Some of us can look away and pretend but when we do this, we forget the pain and suffering of those who cannot. The destruction of lives and careers, displacement from homes and physical and mental trauma and these are passed down generations through painful narratives, keeping us trapped in inter-generational trauma; not all of us can move on. We need to come together as a nation to give true meaning to truth telling and achieving genuine reconciliation, helping our current, past and future generations to heal.

Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that require public truth sharing, apology and commemoration that acknowledges and redresses past harms and violations. Its focus is to replace fear with a sense of security and peaceful coexistence, to build confidence and trust and to develop empathy. Co-existence, trust and empathy has to develop between the individuals who are connected as victims, beneficiaries and perpetrators. We have to create safe spaces for sharing our stories, we have to ensure all sections of our society are engaged including our women, young and elders and there is continuity to ensure healing and closure and narratives that help us move forward as a nation. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability and transparency.

We, in this House were entrusted less than one year ago with the votes of people exercising their democratic rights, the right to choose their leaders. Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether we are in the government or opposition, here we are all leaders. We are here because others put their trust in us. That is why I hope that we will see our way unanimously to bring into being this Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is not easy, it requires us to become vulnerable, to tell our truth, to engage in dialogue with people we are not comfortable with, to be able to listen to them with an open mind and open heart without judgement, with humility and with empathy.

We have to give to those who have hurt us an honest chance to engage with us, to share honestly with them the impact of their actions on us. We also need to explore how we have dealt with our hurts; hurt people, hurt people. We need to acknowledge and reflect on our own words and actions, engage honestly and allow time and process to heal. This will not be easy but healing and growth is never easy. We must do this, we cannot pass the pain and resentment of the present generation to those of the future. We cannot burden their innocence with our past.

There are many lessons to learn from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Canada, Sri Lanka and closer to home, Solomon Islands. Our Commission will have to take into account our cultural context and may have to have Fijian flavour. But let us be clear about one thing. This is not about one community forgiving or seeking forgiveness from another, this is not about divisions of race, religion or province even though those elements play a strong part in it, this is about each of us as human beings with all honesty to look deep into our hearts and confront the things that we have done which may have caused deep loss or hurt to others, people of other ethnic groups but also of our own. Race is not the only fault lying in our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after the civil unrest in 2000, I was part of a trauma healing and peaceful

initiative lead by Father Frank Hoare, an outstanding Columbian priest who has now been in Fiji for 50 years. Through this process I was trained to be a peace facilitator. I joined the team for trauma healing in the Northern Division. Our first facilitation was held in Savusavu.

Our workshop created a space for many factions to come together. There were rebels, members of the security forces and villagers. They were all angry with the other; all angry and hurt. I did not facilitate that session but what observed taught me new realities.

For the first time I saw that indigenous people considered themselves victims of the crisis while many of us Indo-Fijians saw them as perpetrators. After a week long process, raw emotions and many tears, we realised that we were scratching the surface and there was a need for a deeper process. As we travelled to Dreketi, Bua, Macuata and Wainikoro, we saw many indigenous people in confusion. Some had lost their Indo-Fijian tenants and wanted them back. They had lost, not just economic relationships but personal friendships.

We met Indo-Fijian tenants who felt they had no sense of security and were packing to leave. We also met indigenous youth who were embroiled in the civil unrest, taken to task by security forces, confused because they said they only had done what the elders told them to do. We met chiefs who said they thought they were fighting for a cause and were suddenly left high and dry to face the consequences on their own.

I saw similar sentiments in Ra and Tailevu, making me an Indo-Fijian realise there are a lot of unresolved issues within the indigenous community also. When we had sessions with our armed forces, I realised that those who served as trusted peacekeepers carry many burdens of trauma from their assignments and personal losses that go unacknowledged. I have listened to soldiers deeply affected by the 2000 mutiny. These emotions remain raw more than two decades later and needs a process enclosure.

Mr. Speaker, there is much more I can talk about here. I have not talked about the divisions within the Indo-Fijian community. The minority communities such as the Melanesians, some of whom still struggle with their sense of place and identity. But these are the things that do not belong here. They belong to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that I hope we will all endorse and support. Mr. Speaker, this is such a beautiful nation in every way.

Despite the differences, our people standby each other, not only during sports and festivals and joyous times but through every disaster we go through. Our own identities are inter-twined. As Fijians, we are incomplete without the presence of the others. Only when we are able to heal and genuinely accept and love the other, we will truly have Fiji the way the world should be. We owe it to our future generations, Mr. Speaker, and I commend the motion. May God bless Fiji with peace and prosperity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Right now, I have a list of three speakers from the Government side and I have not received a list of speakers from the Opposition. So, honourable Prime Minister then followed by the Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Professor Biman Prasad and rounded off by Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Viliame Gavoka. Whilst we will begin, we will begin with the Government whilst we are waiting for your list, honourable Opposition Whip.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute and support the motion for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission moved by the honourable Sashi Kiran, the motion that is before Parliament at this time. Sir, the motion is probably going to be one of the most important in our parliamentary history. The debate that is now going to unfold will similarly make its mark in the

annals of history of this Parliament and of this nation. The motion calls on us to lead Fiji into a national crusade of healing and reconciliation, to take our homeland, take our home into a new era of unity.

Earlier on this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was in Papua New Guinea. Also present was the Prime Minister of India, the honourable Narendra Modi and also representing His Excellency the President of the United States was Mr. Antony Blinken. In our discussion in which they were both very intently listening to what I was going to say, they were both looking at me and I knew, they knew who I was at that meeting, who I am, who I was some years ago. I proposed an idea for the Leaders of the Pacific that we should strive to make the Pacific a “zone of peace”. That call is still being talked about in leadership circles in the Pacific and it is gaining traction in other parts of the world. This motion as I said, leads Fiji into a national crusade of healing and reconciliation, to take our homeland into a new era of unity.

In the last Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Leader of the Opposition, I had proposed to bring a motion, this same motion. It was opposed in the Business Committee and defeated. On 15<sup>th</sup> March that year, I had a dream and in my contribution to the Business Committee, I quoted the soothsayer in Julius Caesar because of the date. Earlier on, the soothsayer had warned Julius Caesar, “Caesar, beware the Ides of March” and they were passing through the city on the Ides of March; 15<sup>th</sup> March. When Julius Caesar saw the soothsayer on the side of the road, he called out to him, “Behold the Ides of March are come”. The soothsayer spoke to Julius Caesar and said “Aye, Caesar, but not gone” and on that day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world heard of the massacre in Sri Lanka. I thought that to me, it was a call; a call not only to try and find out what happened before 1987, what happened before 2000, what happened before 2006? But why did it happen? Why did those three events happen and appear in the calendar of unfortunate events in our country?

When we were talking about the motion, I thought, I should not move it because in this Parliament, I am the only one guilty of any activity that we would like to find out the background of. You should all support it because you want to know what happened, why we should not have it, why we should move away from those emotions and from those feelings. I believe I was given this opportunity to be able to be part of the discussion of this motion, hopefully we will agree and contribute to the deliberations of the Commission.

We must face the realities that we have. Someone had even said that Fiji is now going through the most turbulent chapter in our independent history as mentioned by the honourable mover. What do we do about it? Do we just move away from it, and hope will heal the wounds or heal the sources of those ill-will that give rise to hostile activities and malicious thoughts that created those situations, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

When South Africa went through their Truth and Reconciliation conferences and meetings, the Great Desmond Tutu said, “At times such as this, it is not enough to look for compromise. It calls on all of us to make sacrifice.” Through this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and driven by our combined resolve, we should aim to remove the division between our two main communities that have co-existed since well before Independence. In fact, I was reminded recently that a commentator once described Fiji as probably one of the most divided countries in the world, as I mentioned and as mentioned also by the honourable mover. But also, we are reminded of what His Holiness Pope John Paul II mentioned when he came to visit Fiji only a few years before 1987. He said, “Fiji the way the world should be”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable mover mentioned the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was held in the Solomon Islands to try and resolve their inter-ethnic violence. I was called by His Excellency the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth to try and broker peace among the

warring factions of the Solomon Islands. At the end, I made a recommendation, recommending a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I do not know why His Excellency Mr. Jitoko (now Justice Titoko) had recommended me to the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth knowing of my own history in Fiji. But during that time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I asked to go to the heart of the rebel camp. The people of Guadalcanal were the ones who were trying to drive the Malaitans off Guadalcanal. I asked the Commissioner of Police, he said, "No it is unsafe, I cannot provide you any escort." So, I asked the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church. He also told me that we could only go as far as the Balisuna Bridge and beyond that was not safe. I went and I walked with my Deputy, Professor Adebowale Adefuye of Nigeria, who was sent by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Chief Emeka Anyaoku.

We were walking through the palm plantation, and I could see that the grass on both sides of the track had been disturbed. I knew there were people probably hiding in the grass, under the grass or behind the grass. All of a sudden, there was a whistle, and everyone stood up with their old World War II weapons and machete, and bows and arrows. Up to that time, Adefuye was asking me, "What is that in your hands?" I said, "Do not worry, you will find it useful."

When they all got up, I sat down in the middle of the road and brought out a bundle of *waka*. I clapped my hands (*cobo*) and presented the *yaqona* to the rebels and their commanders in Fijian. Everything in Fijian up to "*Soso ratu!*" and out of the group someone called out "E!". He moved forward, took up the *waka* from my hands, gave it to the Commander who gave it back to him and he received it in the language of *Sawakasa*, people of Tailevu or the dialect which he had picked up during his time at Fulton.

But that simple presentation, he went on and explained everything to his commanders and to the fighters, who accepted that they should come into the next village hall to talk. I asked if I could bring the Commissioner of Police, and they said no, not yet. "Can I bring the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church." They said yes. So we continued the discussion until they agreed to speak to some politicians. They also asked for someone who was to represent them. That was the beginning of the talks that gave rise to my report which was the foundation of the establishment of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Some of you may have participated when you were in the Forces at the time.

We again took a chartered flight later on when things did not get off the ground. A group of friends from Congress and the Senate in the United States flew down to Australia, and called me to join them in Brisbane, where they had hired an aircraft which flew us to Port Moresby. I was allowed to see the Governor General and the Prime Minister. As we walked into the Prime Minister's office, I saw our own Minister for Foreign Affairs sitting there waiting for an appointment, or an opening to go and see the Prime Minister. I said to him, "*Tu Inoke, e vakacava? Au wara'a ji'o me dua noqu appointment. Oi, o kemudou? Sega neitou appointment, 'eitou sa la'o madaga yani iloma*". So we went to see the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea without an appointment, spoke to him and what we said was "maintain harmonious co-existence among the people of Papua New Guinea".

We came to the Solomon Islands, everyone was in their bunkers. The Governor-General was the only one that could see us, Sir Peter Kenilorea. No-one was serving him, only the ADC. We spoke to him, we asked for his cooperation. We looked for cigar that night Mr. Speaker, Sir, because one of our friends could not sleep without smoking cigar so I said, who knows Honiara? He said I know. At this time the only place open would probably be a Mess but they do not have a Mess or the Yacht Club, they have a Yacht Club. They managed to open the Yacht Club and brought a cigar out for my friend.

We went to Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa all without an appointment but we were received. I think something had preceded us. I think it was the spirit for peace or the strive for reconciliation among the people. We managed to get everyone to come and talk even when we did not have an appointment and when they asked me at the end, what do you think of the Solomons?

Solomons is like driving along and you see someone that has been hit by a hit and run driver and you pick him up and take him to the hospital. The doctor looks at him and they say we have to administer blood transfusion. They save the life and when the comes to, he is strong and he sees blood flowing to his veins, "I cannot have this, I am not allowed to have this" why not? In my belief I am not allowed to receive anyone else's blood. The doctors had to do what they had to do, but he had to sign and then he signs but he was alright. He had already received how many pints of blood but he was alright. That was the story I checked - Solomon needed that. Solomon needed that injection of people to work for Solomon Island's peace.

In this case we are fortunate, we are moving our own motion. We are going to be debating this motion for our own peace, for our own harmonious co-existence with one another and I challenge you all. You do not have any reason to oppose this, I have but I am opening it up. I would probably want to hide a lot of things I know, none of you has anything to hide so we should cooperate and work for this because I, as Minister for Foreign Affairs will continue to develop the idea of the Pacific being a zone of peace and also the Commonwealth of the Pacific, to be one that can be enjoyed by everyone in the Pacific and the world.

We have so much to offer the world but how can we go and offer something that we do not have? If we can do that here, I am encouraged by the language in Parliament; by the way we are interacting with one another and I hope that we can take that out of Parliament and spread it amongst the people and also find out for ourselves what we can do better for the future generations. With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Prime Minister for leading the batting and honourable Members for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders and with respect to the sitting times.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, we still have the current debate and two more motions to be debated. There have been indications of several speakers, so I am asking Parliament to support that we move and sit beyond 4.30 p.m. in order to cover the remaining items.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER. - Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for tea but before doing so, I seek your indulgence. I have two more speakers from the Government side and I have seven from the Opposition side that have been listed. So, I will perhaps ask that since the honourable Prime Minister has taken the lead in the batting order, I would like to strongly suggest that I will be naming the five or six honourable Opposition Members to bat as well without any alternate Member from the Government accept after the fifth and that is where I will call the name of the Deputy Prime Minister honourable Biman Prasad, honourable Ketan Lal and honourable Koya I will then ask Deputy Prime Minister honourable Gavoka to be last speaker on the motion. I hope that speaks well with each and every one of you, honourable Members.

I now adjourn Parliament for tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.03 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.42 p.m.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this motion that is before the Parliament.

At the outset Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will say that I am mindful of Standing Order 62(4)(d) where the words that you utter may incite racial violence or racial “ill-feelings” is the word. I have no intention at all and I ask honourable Members even on this side if you hear me saying something that is close to violating that rule, please raise a Point of Order so that I can withdraw.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all want a country that is united. A country that is prosperous, peaceful, the foundation for that country is stability, security and safety. And to be in a country that is totally united, very prosperous, totally peaceful, where the citizens are safe and secure and there is stability all around, is a dream; perhaps a utopian dream. Because if we look around the world, there is none.

The closest, in my view, is the definition of heaven in the Christian Bible where everything is good. But it is a dream that we carry as the Government, as a Prime Minister, I am sure as the Speaker of the Parliament, as members of the Opposition; a dream that we carry as a father, grandfather, mother, grandmother. It is a dream that we carry even though utopian, but we carry it all the same. I would suggest that it is a dream that we should never ever discard. It has to be there because by it being there, we worked towards it.

As we all know, modern nations are born out of some difficult circumstances, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The modern America was born out of the civil war, very much flavours their political landscape right now, and very much coming to the fore (left and right). We also had the circumstances where the modern Fiji was born and Mr. Speaker, people can take it as far back as to the myth that we migrated from Africa, we had this period where we were colonised, we were offered to be colonised. There was this period where we became independent and dominant of the Commonwealth, we were declared a Republic out of a *coup* and this is how the events that have saved us and that is the nation that we are today.

But as we navigate through and every nation navigates through, through the circumstances and the events that come, problems begin to surface. This morning we heard the problem that we are facing about child abuse, problem that we should deal with, there is this problem of drugs, yesterday I heard honourable Tuinaceva talking about the carnage on our roads. These are problems that surface as we build this nation, utopian idea that it is the best nation surfaces any risk and these are the problems that Government deal with. But in all nations and almost all societies, there are deep-rooted problems that exist and regardless even of those deep-rooted problems, we still have that utopian dream that our country is peaceful, safe and secure, good for me now, good for my children and good for my grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion before us defines the problem as, and I quote: “conflicting statements and utterances regarding motives behind the political upheaval”. That is the way the motion is worded and the end state that it desires is that closer and healing for Fiji is achieved and permanently put to rest. The way the motion is structured does not show a big problem, it is conflicting statements of events, how do you solve it? Deconflict the conflicting statements but I think we all know, what the problem is.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a Western concept. We have our own and you understand it very well. For us the way we forgive begins from a perpetrator, he goes to the person that he hurt and asks for forgiveness, *matanigasau*, *bulubulu* and ours in the *iTaukei* is a ritual. It is a ritual when we go and ask for forgiveness, never starts from the person that was victimised to use the word, it always starts from the perpetrator, I know that I did wrong and then I go and do what I have to do according to our tradition and customs.

In our culture when that is done you forgive and forget. An amazing part of our Fijian culture is the ability, after all is said and when that ritual is performed, we forgive and we forget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we talk about reconciliation, we talk about forgiveness. I will tell you a very quick story and my reaction.

I know and I was watching the live church service that was done spearheaded by the Methodist Church where the Church sought forgiveness from the descendants of the Giritiya, and I think, *Qaselevu* honourable Penioni Ravunawa was also there. I watched that and the exchanges and the words that were said. I am a member of the Methodist Church, I am the *iVakatawa* in the Church, and when the Methodist Church had their Conference lately, when they had the elections, and then when the Secretary General was elected, and they overlooked the descendant of the Giritiya, I told myself “no”, what a wonderful opportunity to show that forgiveness that you sought from them, because all these years, the Deputy Secretary General has always been the next Secretary General and the optics to me was so wrong. I told myself, “Man, you just lost a wonderful opportunity to really show that forgiveness.” It is up to them, I will say, and I have no say in it, but I am just talking about the optics and my reaction to it. I am talking about the optics for me and I know that they have their own way of doing that. I am not saying that the election is wrong, I am just saying that that optics knowing that they had done that forgiveness church service before.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problem we have is the divide that exists in our society, the divide along racial lines, and now there is even a bigger divide along political lines. There is that divide and I think the big task that we have is to try and narrow the gap as much as we can and we keep working on it and pull it together.

In 2000, it was the first time I heard this word ‘ethnonationalism’, said to me by an officer, who is now doing the review of the GCC, Colonel Baledrokadroka. We were talking about why that is happening and he was sharing with me his thoughts along this idea of ethnonationalism, and why he thought that it was a big root cause of what was happening. That word stuck with me and I studied and read in to those that know things about ethnonationalism.

I think that if you want our nation to come together as one, and we have proved, as mentioned by the honourable Kiran, the times when we can show that we unite when there is a rugby game on, we breathe as one and our heart beat beats as one; when a big disaster hits, we breathe as one and our heart beat beats as one. We can and it can be done, but it was only in those circumstances that just happened in Fiji, and this nation that utopian dream that we are dreaming about this nation is happening. We are getting there.

We had three Olympic gold medals, this tiny nation of Fiji: one in the Paralympics, two in the main Olympics. I think the honourable Prime Minister wears one of the highest medal decorations from the French Foreign Legion, and that is because of the work that we do in the peacekeeping arena, we are considered one of the best in the world, this tiny nation best in the world when it comes to peacekeeping. We are getting there, we are building but I think that we need to tackle the deep-rooted problems that we have.

We are equal and for me equal in the eyes of God starts from there, equality because we are

equal in the eyes of God. If that is the start point of our wanting to continue to build and working on that very utopian dream I think we will get there and I have no doubt that we will get there. I was amazed at the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, he refers to him, "I am a British Hindu" not a Indo-British or a British of Indian decent. That is just the way he introduced himself - I am a British Hindu. It is equality Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we have the truth and reconciliation Commission you are opening up wounds of the past, it needs to be opened up, it needs to be treated so that it can heal.

I would like to caution Mr. Speaker, Sir, that as we try and open the wounds of the past, treat it and get it healed and we must make sure that we are not creating wounds now. Equality that we strive for can be dealt with policies, policies that unite, policies that bring us together, policies that leave no person behind regardless of who he or she is. It can be dealt with laws that deal with us equally.

I dream of a country not for me really, that utopian dream is not for me, this is mine, it is for my grandchildren, my children. I am grateful enough to see their faces and God has been favourable to me to allow me to live this long to see my grandchildren's faces but I can only dream of the country of the Fiji that we live in right now and I have a dream of that country that I talked about where it does not matter where they come from, it does not matter that they come from the smallest island in Vatoa, it is closer to Tonga than to Suva.

It does not matter that he is a Lauan, he lives or she lives in that country and on merit and the only thing that is important for him or her is to work hard and live your life. We can build that country, one day it will happen. We have to be tough, I think we have to be brave enough to face those deep rooted problems that plague our society, we have to be brave enough, it might cost us our political career but be brave enough to tackle it and put in place those policies, those laws that bring us together.

I talked about political divide and I mentioned that it is widening, this is why I say it, when we see that most of the things that were put in place by the government of the past has been dismantled, it means also that the 200,000 people that voted for us you know I am feeling bad also because that is the reason why they voted and so our divide widens now.

So, I plead that if you want and work on that utopian dream of this country that is prosperous, peaceful and stable, good for my grandchildren, good for your grandchildren we have to be tough and face those deep-rooted problems that we have.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now offer the floor to honourable Tuicolo.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a short contribution towards the motion that is before Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, why is there an urgency in the establishment of such Commission in the face of a socially cultural sick society?

Mr. Speaker, are you aware that around 80 percent of deaths in Fiji this year alone are caused by Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and those numbers are still growing?

Mr. Speaker, according to the Fiji Sun Editorial on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2023 the number of new HIV infections has surged by a staggering 260 percent since 2010 making Fiji the second fastest country in the Asia Pacific with the HIV epidemic.

Mr. Speaker, teenage pregnancy has totalled to 1,279 from 2018 to 2021 between the ages of

13 and 19. According to the Women Crisis Centre, children both boys and girls under 11 years old are indulging in sexual activities.

Mr. Speaker, sexual offences numbers from the DPP's office is very shocking with 768 cases in the year 2022. The youngest accused being a 12-year-old boy and the youngest victim being a 3 year old girl.

Mr. Speaker, on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2015 Fiji was ranked fourth in percentage for searches of the word 'porn' and ninth for searchers of the word 'pornography'.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot blame children and youth alone. The parent must bear a bigger responsibility of what is happening in Fiji.

The *Bible* clearly states in Proverbs 22:6 for parents to train their children while they are young.

Mr. Speaker, we need to educate our adult population. We need to spend money in educating our adult population on parenting. According to the *Signs of the Times* monthly magazine dated on 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1889:

“If parents decide to teach their children self-control they must form the habit themselves. The scolding and fault finding of parents encourage a hasty passionate temper in the child”.

Mr. Speaker, how far back should we go on this reconciliation agenda? The reconciliation must not be limited only to one event or period.

Mr. Speaker, let us go back to the Girit era when the last ship S.S. Sutlej carrying 888 labourers arrived on November, 1916. Some 42 ships made 87 voyages and carried about 60,000 labourers destined for the Colony of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, we all know when they were in the sugarcane plantation, they were treated like animals, beaten, poorly housed, meagre pay and long hours of work, poor medical facilities and poor educational arrangements for their children, shortage of women amongst labourers created a huge social problem, being confined like sardine in the ship laid to the breaking of the caste system and emergence of the Jahaji Bhai System.

Mr. Speaker, after all those sacrifices and suffering the event of 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1987 Fiji's first military coup the Indo-Fijians were badly brutalised. This pain has traumatised the lives and minds of Indo-Fijians. This shattered the economy of Fiji. Many fled the shores of Fiji to settle in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America. This began the flights of capital and skills from Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, sincere thanks to the FijiFirst Government which has given all Fijians a common name and sense of belonging and respect. Fijians of Indian descent are no longer treated as *vulagi* under the 2013 Constitution, they continue to play a vital role in the economy of this country. We must also consider the unfair treatment done to our people in Navosa during the little war in 1876 where many of our people and chiefs were either killed or exiled to the other parts of Fiji. A good example are the people of Colo-West who are in Koro, perhaps this is one of the areas where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission should start from.

Mr. Speaker, we must also remember that in 1944 there were 13 provinces in mainland Viti Levu. During the reorganisation of that year Nadi, Lautoka, Colo-North, Colo-East and Colo-West Provinces were scrapped and dropped. This is one of the biggest blunders and injustices done to the *iTaukei* administration in the Western part of Viti Levu. Why combine the Nadi Province, Lautoka Province and Ba Province together with vast land and natural resources and keeping Rewa and Tailevu intact? Perhaps, it was purposely done to undermine or weaken the West. While the Eastern bloc are unaffected, the ill-conceived westerners continue to be satisfied with the present arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, we in Navosa are still asking whatever government to come into power to release us from Nadroga. More than 20 *tabua* have been used since 1987 to request for the separation. On Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1999, Navosa Province have been granted to become a separate and fifteenth province of Fiji. The Permanent Secretary of Fijian Affairs that time, the late Ratu Meli Bainimarama assured in Navosa chiefs that he would work on other aspects and requirements before the declaration of Navosa as the fifteenth province.

Mr. Speaker, we are now still eagerly waiting for the Emancipation Day. That is where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission should focus on. It appears that this motion is geared towards a camouflage of a sinister agenda of an *iTaukei* ultranationalist propaganda.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Come on!

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, we should not regard this proposed Reconciliation Commission as relevant for Fiji just because it has been used in other countries with very different settings. Do we really need to establish this Truth and Reconciliation Commission when the FijiFirst Government through the 2013 Constitution has already bandaged and healed the wound? What we are doing today is just re-opening the wound.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What happened to 2000?

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, I beg you please...

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- ... leave everything as it is because the healing has already taken place.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we are touching a very sensitive topic and I ask for your co-operation, let us hear them up. That is the very heart of what is being introduced here. Please let us show some maturity and let us listen.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the motion on hand. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, what is our priority at this time? Putting bread on the table, bus fare increases, trying ways to decrease it, the high cost of living for our society or our people, crime is on the rise, farmers are struggling with the high cost of inputs and mass exodus of our population to greener pastures which is Australia and New Zealand and others. These are the key important priorities I feel that we as representatives of the people need to discuss and try to resolve it, not using this much needed resources into establishing a Commission which does nothing to address the basic needs.

Why do we need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission? These Commissions are set up after a period of oppression or conflict. There has not been a conflict recently. Why do we need to set up a Commission now? Which period are we discussing, are we only discussing the first coup, the second *coup* or everything from Independence until now or are we discussing issues prior to

Independence? It is a can of worms, if you open one, everything will spill out, there are a lot of things need to be discussed, so we need to set our priorities right. How many times are we going to say sorry?

If one's apology is sincere and genuine, then one sincere apology is good enough; looks like all these apologies which we have been getting is just a show. If it was a sincere apology, that should have been enough, but it is not. If you talk about the events of the first and second coups, a lot of us have lost our livelihoods, our dear ones and to some extent our identity. Do people think that simply setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a simple sorry will set it right? No, it will not.

I personally lost my dad because of the *coups*. No matter how many commissions you set, no matter how reconciliations you do, that gap in my life will remain and no amount of sorry will fill that gap. We cannot reconcile if some of the citizens of Fiji are referred to or called visitors, not matter in which language it is called, that is not reconciliation. We cannot achieve reconciliation if equal employment opportunities is not provided to all citizens. One has to look at the recent appointments, it clearly spells out, I do not know why people are so silent about it. Reconciliation will never be achieved if policies are leaned towards one particular ethnic community or a division. Policies should be set to benefit all citizens of Fiji, not only one particular group or ethnicity.

There are a lot of ways we can reconcile without setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If one wants to reconcile in this society then we should follow the Constitution of Fiji. A lot of decisions, a lot of actions are being taken that does not concur with the Constitution. This Constitution is what bridges the gap in the society and recognises every citizen equal. If one is to genuinely reconcile, then your actions on the ground should be more important than what the commissions or establishments we want to make.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is human nature that if one approaches or touches a scorpion, he has to take care, he has to be very careful, he needs to understand. By nature, the scorpion will sting, and for us to reconcile, the attitude of the scorpion needs to go. Before sitting, Sir, I would like to conclude by quoting from the same play the honourable Prime Minister has quoted, the last words Julius Caesar said before he was stabbed to death "*Et tu Brute?*" which means, "You too Brutus?"

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide my views on the motion before the House. At the outset, let me reiterate that what we need in this country is not a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but political maturity, adherence to the rule of law, compliance with the 2013 Constitution and recognising that Fiji is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. Constant echoes of divide is made by the leaders who should be healing the divide.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it hurts when Indo-Fijians are called *vulagi*. Is this reconciliation? Where is political maturity? We have heard the honourable Prime Minister apologising to Girmityas and he has done it many times. After barely a few months later, he calls the same people he apologised to as *vulagi*. The main reason is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we came after. So, the whole debate is, who came first?

People who came here have passed away. I did not come with my great grandparents. My parents were born here, I was born here. Apologies will not heal or reconcile, and a living example is our honourable Prime Minister, he has been apologising but doing the opposite. Words and actions matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have heard from honourable Naupoto, after the Methodist Church sought forgiveness, they did the opposite. It is the words and actions that matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013 Constitution provides all Fijians irrespective of one's race,

religion, cast or creed, it gives us equal citizenry. And then whatever I have discussed now is the same government that brings in a motion to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is where I feel that as leaders, we lack maturity, we are not responsible for the words that we say.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we look around the world, there are a few countries that have established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Why are few countries? It is because they had very serious issues of human rights violation, civil wars, atrocities, persecutions, child abuse and very serious social injustices.

Whatever it was, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established for a specific purpose to investigate a single matter. Below are few examples:

- South Africa - to transition from apartheid to democracy.
- Peru - human rights abusers suffered during internal arm conflicts of 1980s and 1990s.
- Sierra Leone - addressing war crimes and human rights abuses during the civil war.
- Timor-Leste - human rights abuses committed during the Indonesian occupation.
- Mauritius - to determine appropriate measures to be extended to descendants of slaves and indentured labourers.
- Nepal - investigation of disappeared persons.
- Liberia - violence and human rights abuses during Liberia's civil war.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question I have are outlined below:

1. Are we going to back to 1879, the commencement of Girit as Mauritius did?
2. Are we going to go back to the first coup in Fiji in 1987?
3. Are we going to go back to the overthrow of the Chaudhry government in 2000?
4. Mutiny in 2000 or the overthrow of the Qarase government in 2006?

The question is, why are we trying to open the wounds, Mr. Speaker Sir? In some cases, as the saying goes, time heals. I believe that establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is more to deviate attention from the real issues facing the country – the underlying issues of economic inequality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as leaders, we should be focusing mainly on policies where we can grow our economy and we can look after the disadvantaged in our community. We should be focusing on economic growth and developing policies that will assist in bringing in equality in this country. If we are able to achieve that then we will not have such issues that we are discussing today. In a small country like Fiji, establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission gives a signal to the world that we do have some serious issues. This will have a negative impact on investor confidence or even consumer confidence, having huge impact on our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the main challenges of establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the danger of political manipulation. The Government might use it to selectively investigate the political opponents while protecting their own interest which can undermine the impartiality and credibility of such a Commission and there are many cases available which talk about impacts, effectiveness of Truth and Reconciliation Commission and it is advisable that we should be on top of what has happened in other countries before we even adopt this.

Mr. Speaker Sir, it can also lead to the provision of a form of amnesty or leniency for those who have committed serious crimes. This Coalition Government continues to disregard the Constitution, the rule of law. They are pursuing their agenda without proper legal procedures which

poses significant threat to the stability and integrity of the nation and this is what we all should be focusing on.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission often rely on voluntary testimony which means that not all individuals with relevant information may come forward. Some perpetrators may choose not to testify leading to an incomplete picture of the truth. Witnesses may be afraid to speak openly due to fear of the reprisals, victims will also have a high expectation that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will provide them with justice or compensation but if these expectations are not met it can lead to disillusionment and disappointment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must pause and ask ourselves whether Fiji has that level of human rights violation, abuses, atrocities and political persecutions. Our issues are not as extensive and serious as we have seen in countries where Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been established. What Fiji needs is further strengthening of the institutions that are there to protect all Fijians from human rights abuses, racial and other discrimination. We must make this institution totally independent of any political interference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a Constitution that guarantees our fundamental rights and recognise all citizens as equal. We should work towards political maturity and acceptance. Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you want to achieve a better nation for our children and our grandchildren, we need to address the underlying issues. The underlying issues in my view is lack of political maturity and economic inequality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is an important motion that we have in Parliament as you earlier mentioned it touches our heart and in totality, we cannot deal with it with our own physical strength. I read to us a scripture passage from the Bible - Philippians 2: 3-4:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking at your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Humility allows us to approach reconciliation with a willingness to listen, to learn, to acknowledge our shortcoming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first for me personally when I am putting my head around this motion presented before Parliament, in my personal opinion, it is poorly worded and it can have several immediate and long-term effects. Poorly worded motions can often bring confusion and misinterpretation. It can also give us a difficult time as Parliamentarians, to fully understand the intended purpose or implications of the proposed motion.

This confusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may result in honourable Members voting in favour or against something that we do not fully grasp. If a motion is poorly worded it may also fail to meet the necessary procedural requirements. First and foremost, the honourable Members of Parliament, due to its unclear and ambiguous nature, lacks to support that can undermine the credibility of parliament, credibility of Government and weaken its ability to effectively advance its agenda.

In extreme cases, Mr. Speaker, Sir, poorly worded motions can raise legal and legislative concerns. If the language used in a motion is vague or contradictory it may create legal loopholes of conflict with existing laws. This can lead to legal challenge and costly revision to rectify the issues, and also public perception and accountability.

A poorly worded motion can impact the Government's image and perception. It may be seen as a sign of incompetence or negligence. It can erode public trust and confidence in Government's

ability to govern effectively. It's an important juncture that we are in this afternoon - we can be setting precedents. In looking at the motion itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it requires careful consideration of language, the legal requirements, potential interpretations or the consequences of this motion.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the Fijian Constitution of 2013 includes provision of truth and reconciliation. It is important to note that the decision to establish a commission for truth and reconciliation is often based on a specific circumstance of the country or the community.

Mr. Speaker, our Constitution gives Rights to all Fijians. We are all equal in the eyes of God and also in the eyes of the Law and we are united in this country for a common purpose. Every Fijian is equal. We are equal in accessing justice through the courts. We are equal with our Right to equality and freedom from discrimination. That is the basis of the 2013 Constitution.

If it is already there, duplicating a legislation, it can have a detrimental effects to our nation. In duplication a legislation can lead to redundancy and confusion within the legal framework. It may create over-lapping provision and inconsistent legal interpretation, causing difficulties in implementing and enforcing the law effectively.

Mr. Speaker Sir, duplicating a legislation with a specific purpose or significant amendment can be a waste of resources and time. It needs careful consideration in order to avoid under-mining the principles of legal certainty. Regarding to the proposed and reconciliation Bill tabling in Parliament today, Mr. Speaker Sir, it is essential to once again evaluate its objectives, provisions, the potential impact before concluding whether it constitutes duplicative legislation or not, or if the Bill aims to address specific gaps or issues that are not already covered in the existing legislation. Ultimately, it is crucial for law and policy makers to carefully assess the necessity, implications and duplicating legislation to ensure the legal framework remain clear, efficient and representative of the communities need.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the brag of the Fiji 2013 Constitution and the pathway and framework of the people's charter for building a better Fiji, we have done well to ourselves. I believe honourable Kiran, the mover of the motion, herself has testimonies and good stories that she can testify to the transformation that took place in the event of exchange with the *vanua* of Navilaca in Noco, and the elevation accorded to the descendants of the *Girmitiyas* to the esteemed position of *luvena na turaga na ratu*. All those exchanges and transformations took place without the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Fiji is blessed, not because of the sun, sea and the sand, but because in the early 1800s, when missionaries first came to the nation, they brought with them the Gospel message that our forefathers embraced, and that is why we are different. We can easily forgive and move along. I will end there.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will start by quoting the honourable Prime Minister, as well as myself on what we said during the Gimit Commemoration and Reconciliation Service organised by the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma at the Vodafone Dome on Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> May this year. This is relevant to the debate on the need for Parliament to agree to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This is not a Bill, as stated by honourable Ravunawa, this is a motion to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. All the motion seeks to do is to ask Parliament to agree to the appointment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission so that we can have some debate and discussions as to what it will amount to. Obviously, the terms of reference and the appointment by the President of the Commission will be after Parliament agrees.



The honourable Prime Minister, while confessing his wrongdoing in 1987, and asking for forgiveness, said, and I quote:

“We confess our wrongdoings, we confess that we have hurt so many of our people in Fiji, particularly those of our Indo-Fijian communities at the time, and amongst them were sons and daughters of those who were indentured labourers from India between 1879 and 1916. The power to forgive is beyond our human power. The power to forgive is godly. As you forgive you release us and you are released. You are released from hatred, from your anger and we begin to feel the peace of God coming to our beings and our lives”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will quote what I said on that momentous day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I quote:

“This may well be the start of resetting the moral compass of our nation and repairing the social moral and political fabric so badly needed to forge a united and harmonious future. More importantly, what Fiji and our diaspora have just witnessed has sowed the seeds for a truth and reconciliation commission so critically needed to put a permanent closure to an ugly chapter of upheavals. Once and for all it will put an end to those whose political ambitions devolve around invoking fear and ill-will by fanning the flames of racism. The courage and humility of the Methodist Church in apologising for the hurt, pain and suffering caused to the descendants of the *Girmitiya* community by the *iTaukei* community should be an eye opener to those who have participated in the political upheavals but continued to defend their role.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly support this historic motion and this, if I may state, is a National Federation Party motion, seconded by the honourable Prime Minister as the Leader of the People’s Alliance Party and also supported by the SODELPA Party and its leader. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion was entrusted to what I say an Indo-Fijian woman of the National Federation Party, the party that I lead by us in the Coalition Government including the Prime Minister and to which honourable Sashi Kiran did not hesitate to do.

The issue of harmonious race relations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a long held question that she herself, has toiled in her previous role as an NGO leader. I must say Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kiran is a perfect example of someone who has learned to confront her own fears, not by castigating others or playing the blame game but by making an honest effort to understand the wishes, aspirations, and fears of other races or ethnic groups. That is why honourable Sashi Kiran is such a passionate advocate Sir, of *luvedra na Ratu mai Noco, Rewa*.

We have heard before that the Commission is a pre-requisite Mr. Speaker, Sir, to genuine healing which is crucial to our effort to make Fiji a land of hope and opportunity. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you may not be aware that in confirmative to the National Federation Party’s principles and the party they tried to move a similar motion in Parliament during its sitting in April 2017, and of course that motion was not allowed.

Six years later Mr. Speaker, Sir, under your leadership we are kind of putting a rest to our ghosts and essentially laying the foundation for what a nation wants to bequeath to our future generations. That too Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you said earlier this morning without promoting or provoking ill-will or any kind of hostility and pinging upon the rights and freedoms of our people.

I think, Mr. Speaker, a Commission is necessary for us as Fijians to come to terms with the past and there is quite a lot. Some have gone in Girit days, others have gone even before that

because we need to accept this on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation somewhere.

I know it is not a secret that attempts to reconcile the past efforts to encourage truth telling, confessing our wrongdoings or even apologising to the victims of political upheavals were turned into political football and band standing and that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are aware.

For many years truth telling and taking ownership of mistakes that have robbed the nation had actually disappeared. And until 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of the Girit Day reconciliation organised by the Methodist Church, no racial intolerance but love, respect and sound of goodwill, understanding and mutual peaceful co-existence. The Fiji Forward Declaration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that occasion that we signed cemented our resolve to work together and the leaders of political parties without any fear or racial prejudice.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that some may argue as we have heard that the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission will open old wounds impede progress. However, Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that true confronting are passed. We can actually find a way for a brighter and more harmonious future. Sometimes confronting the past, discussing the past, what happened in the past can lead to a better future, it can shine light on truth. We have heard mentioned deep rooted, underlying mistrust, prejudice, divisions that hinder us moving forward. I know the South African experience has been mentioned.

The South African experience, Mr. Speaker, demonstrated the transformative power of collective truth telling and forgiveness. It kind of provided a blueprint for healing, unity and growth.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to respond to some of the points that have been raised before. I think, honourable Naupoto was right when he was talking about stability, security, he related those two issues.

If you look at Fiji, Mr. Speaker, 39 years ago we were better than Mauritius on all indicators: economics, social indicators and some of us were wondering why Fiji cannot be the Mauritius of the Pacific. A lot of the research, studies and my own research on Mauritius with comparison to Fiji shows that the respect for rule of law, democracy but more importantly the social cohesion.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about law, I know the honourable Members from the other side talked about rule of law - the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there is no sense of purpose, unity, trust between different communities if there are prejudices, mistrust than any law you cannot legislate these things. We have seen four constitutions in this country. The 1970 Constitution was agreed to by the then NFP leader and the leader of the Alliance Party. It was in many ways a negotiated Constitution, it provided a Bill of Rights, it provided a system of government where all those principles were embedded. But that Constitution was thrown out.

Then we had the 1990 Constitution which was imposed. Then the honourable Prime Minister showed leadership with the other political leaders and got the 1997 Constitution which actually provided power-sharing. It was more a concessional type of politics where power sharing was made a law. Yet Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Constitution was also thrown out.

Then we had the 2013 Constitution imposed on the people of Fiji. It might be the best constitution in the views of people or the population; a sizeable section of the population. We have heard about laws and policies, yes laws and policies are important. I heard Members talked about issues. Yes, those are issues that we need to deal with whether it is drugs, NCD, economic growth, poverty or lack of economic growth, these things do not happen in a vacuum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion is a great opportunity. This is not about hiding something as the honourable Prime Minister said and he is absolutely right. If there is anything in this Parliament amongst us right now, it is something that he would, but he is showing the wisdom saying let us talk about it. If there is a dispute in any small family household setting, if the people are not getting on and if you do not talk about it, if you try and hide it under some kind of law and policy, it will never work. It has never worked in any country.

Honourable Kumar talked about political maturity - yes, this is political maturity. This is political maturity that we, as Members of Parliament, are prepared to talk about what happened in the past. We are showing courage as Members of Parliament. But if you say, "look, we do not want to talk about this, we want to go by some law that everyone should respect without addressing the underlying principles, without talking about how we can merge our interest, how we can enhance social cohesion at all levels", Mr. Speaker. Sir, you cannot guarantee and you cannot satisfy. I think the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is also about education. We cannot continue to be cantankerous in our expressions of views that we hold very strongly at a personal level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, personally we were all part of it in terms of opposing, talking about democracy, talking about human rights. There are a lot of human right violations that took place in the last so many year. Whether you are talking about 1987, 2000, 2006 people died after the human rights were violated. Some waited for 10 to 15 years to come back to their own country. These are all issues there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is a great opportunity for this Parliament to talk about these things. It is not about opening old wounds. The old wounds are there and we keep talking about those wounds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Premila Kumar talked about confidence that this will somehow share our confidence. In fact what this motion will do if the honourable Members of the Opposition give this a bipartisan support this will be a defining moment for this country, Mr. Speaker, this will spur confidence, this will bring that sense of freedom and exuberance in the ability of our country and everyone knows it is not true that Fiji is not recognised as a country where there are issues and we keep talking about it here in Parliament as well. When we were in Opposition, we talked about it.

Some people say about the Constitution, honourable Tikoduadua talked about how the Police Force was totally racialised in terms of 90 percent of the officers coming from a one particular group. It happened under the 2013 Constitution so it is not always about law, not always about policies, you can have the best Constitution, you can have the best law, you can think about the best policies but if there no sense of unity, purpose, understanding each other's sensitivities, fears, expressions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will not be able to.

I am not saying, the mover of the motion is not saying that we will solve all the problems tomorrow after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. No one is saying that, but Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will be a great opportunity for us not only as honourable Members of Parliament but because when you talk about political maturity and what people see below, comes from that political maturity, that ability to get together and talk about issues.

So Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those words, I urge the honourable Members on the Opposition side not to forgo this opportunity. This is going to be an historic bipartisan opportunity to work together. We may not agree with all the pluses and minuses of having the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but at least we would have tried altogether collectively to move towards a situation where we are able to come together and talk about these issues and move forward. I strongly commend this motion to all the honourable Members of this Parliament.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the honourable Members of this Parliament, I thank the honourable Opposition Members for their contributions to this motion. I stand before you to shed light on the dark side of the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission as presented by the Coalition Government.

While the intention may seem noble, we must confront the potential damaging consequences that this endeavour might inflict upon our people. First and foremost, we cannot ignore the harsh reality that Truth and Reconciliation Commission has the potential to reopen wounds that have barely healed. It is not just the matter of reliving the past traumas, it is a cruel reminder of the pain our fellow Fijians endured. This process could be traumatising for countless victims, leaving scars that may never truly heal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us also consider the financial burden placed on our already strained resources. Establishing and maintaining such a Commission is an expensive endeavour. At a time when our nation faces economic challenges, should we really prioritise initiative that may drain our coffers? Should we not be focusing on immediate needs of our Fijians instead? Furthermore, there is a grave risk that this Truth and Reconciliation Commission may become a platform for political manipulation. The Government with all its power and influences could use this Commission to promote its own agenda and selectively target individuals or groups potentially deepening the divisions within our society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must also recognise that Truth Commissions by design, do not possess the power to prosecute perpetrators, and this raises the question of accountability. Will those responsible for heinous crimes simply be allowed to walk free and their sins forgiven in the name of reconciliation? Is this justice, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Let us not be naïve about the willingness of all the stakeholders to participate. The scars of the past run deep and some may choose not to engage with the Commission. Will their voices be silenced, and their stories left untold? Is that the kind of reconciliation we truly seek?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission because today the Fijian people already stand more united than at any other point in their history and that is owed to the unprecedented state of civil, political, socio-economic rights and a sign of all time in our beloved 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

For those who do not know our Constitution unlike those on that side of Parliament Mr. Speaker, Sir, and past governments before, FijiFirst knows that the only true path to unity is through equality. That belief and commitment is defined given everything Fiji has achieved under the FijiFirst government and the leadership of the former Prime Minister Bainimarama. In the very Preamble of the Fijian Constitution states clearly that we are all Fijians, united by a common and equal citizenry and because of our Constitution, for the first time in our history, we are all equal in the eyes of the law and united with a common purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and honourable Members because of our Constitution, every Fijian knows that their vote and voice matter the same, that all our citizens are equal, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, gender, physical ability or where they live in Fiji and that is the truth the Fijian people deserve; the truth the FijiFirst Government was able to make a reality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Constitution also recognises the right of indigenous Fijians, the *iTaukei* and the Rotuman people. It guarantees the ownership and protection of their land and the unique culture, traditions, customs and language. Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the same Constitution every Fijian has equal access to justice through the courts or tribunals, executive and administrative justice, freedom of speech, expression and publication, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, the

right to fair employment practices, the right to equality and freedom from discrimination, freedom from compulsory, acquisition of property, the right to education and economic participation, the right to work and a just minimum wage, the right to reasonable access to transportation, the rights of children and the rights of persons with disabilities and the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the basis of unity, that is a Fiji for every Fijian and with the foundation of equality in place, FijiFirst embarked on a programme of Legal and Policy Reform that has uplifted every Fijian from all walks of life all across our nation. We have achieved eight straight years of economic growth. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have achieved the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, we have made education free.

FijiFirst have built a network of reliable infrastructure and services throughout the country. We had formed our first National University, we had expanded access to scholarship and affordable tertiary loans. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FijiFirst has done all that because we had adhered to the mandate setup by the Fijian Constitution. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FijiFirst had achieved such success because for the first time in Fijian history, we can say with every confidence that our unity is our strength. We have no bounds that divides our society that the past governments sought to entrench. We had levelled the playing field for every Fijian and we have put greater opportunity in the lives of all our people everywhere in our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while on the subject of truth, I see great irony in the Coalition Government which is posing this motion when they themselves are so blind to the true history of our country. They ask about truth and reconciliation while they themselves live in denial of the truth.

Mr. Speaker, they live in denial of the years of institutionalised discrimination and systematic oppression of our fellow Fijians that crippled our nation for decades. FijiFirst had recognise the dark part of our history and we have come to grips with the grim reality that was faced by far too many Fijians for far too long.

Mr. Speaker, Fijians who felt unwelcomed in their own homes and those on the margins of society were excluded from meaningful participation in their country. FijiFirst recognised the immense harm those years caused and our leader, Mr. Bainimarama had made it his personal mission to ensure that Fiji never slips back into those lost years. It is our Constitution and the strong and independent institutions that establishes and guarantees equality in our society. It is equality that unites us as one nation, one people. That is the truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and armed with the truth. We will continue to carry Fiji into the future.

While reconciliation is a noble aspiration, we must be cautious about the potential negative repercussions of establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We must consider the emotional toll on our people, the financial strain on our nation, the risk of political manipulation, the lack of accountability and the potential silencing of voices.

Mr. Speaker, let us tread carefully on this path for the road to reconciliation is fraught with uncertainties and potential pitfalls that could harm our beloved Fiji and its people.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor to honourable Koya, I intend to adjourn Parliament now. I have been informed that dinner is ready and probably after having your meal then we shall come and finish off the day's agenda.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.12 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.30 p.m.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion before the House is asking the House to setup a Truth and Reconciliation Commission so that a lot of things can be done but it is not very specific in its form at the moment. It has been badly drafted. It is asking literally to facilitate open, free engagement truth telling and confront fears in view of conflicting statements and utterances regarding motives behind political upheavals so that closure and healing for Fiji is achieved and permanently put to rest this unfortunate turbulent chapter of our independent history.

Mr. Speaker, we have a history, we have quite a substantial and how history goes back to, not just the upheavals from 1987 and onwards, but also during Colonial times for which I am sure you are aware of. I can speak a little bit on that because of my family and I mean my father, the late honourable S.M. Koya who sat in this very chair during Colonial times and also during Independence. He was someone who also went through the Colonial times and fought hard.

I can relay a story about how they were treated then by the Colonial rulers of Fiji at that time. He and a very famous man from Ba, for those of you from Ba would remember, his name was Sashi Mahendra Singh. They used to go across to the Grand Pacific Hotel and put their money on the table to try and get a room, only to be chased out of there because they were coloured. We are all coloured but today we are all Fijians irrespective of colour.

That kind of persecution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, led them to be strong, led them to be patriotic and it led them to work hard to develop this great nation of ours. Despite our frailties and difficulties, they never asked for any Truth and Reconciliation Commission to move forward. Their philosophy then was if you got burnt, you are left with a scar that you had to witness for the rest of your life, you cannot remove it; the same principle applies here. We have scars all over this country, but we will never ever be able to remove that, but we must put that at the back of our minds and move forward. We cannot dig it up some more, we cannot allow this to happen.

Mr. Speaker, truth be told, if you really want the truth, why do you need a Commission? If you really want reconciliation, go no further then how we culturally do it. We have a system culturally within the indigenous folk who actually have a reconciliation system that we all used all the time for literally everything. A lot of that has been done already in the churches amongst our families. Even the honourable Prime Minister, I am sure his testament to the fact that so many have actually happened. Why is it that we actually keep digging this up again and again? I want to correct few things also.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Professor Biman Prasad said that he had somewhat, I think it was 2021 that he said, he did as for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission ...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In 2017.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- ... to Parliament. He said that Fiji needs a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for truth telling to bring a closure to the traumatic events arising out of our four military *coups*. He said it was grossly unjust, unfair and most unreasonable that people especially those subjected to unlawful detention, harassment, torture and abused by the security forces especially the military are prevented from seeking justice and compensation. That was the core basis of that application.

Many people who championed democracy and human rights were victims of torture and abused by the military, and I quote:

“Following the 1987 *coup* pro-democracy activists were also subjected to detention. Some were tortured after 2000 *coup*, many became victims of violence committed by those supporting the mayhem.”

He went on to say that the 2013 Constitution entrenched the limitation of liability for the Limitation of Liability for Prescribed Political Events Decree 2010 which means the alleged perpetrators of violence of human rights abuse cannot be brought to justice. We do not know what the reasoning is behind this particular motion because they have not said anything.

His also spoken about compensation. We do not know. I am not labelling any accusation here, I am just saying that we do not know what is being sought here. What I must point out with the greatest of respect to the former speaker, Sir, who sat in that very chair who ruled that the motion was inadmissible under the Standing Orders because debate of the motion would be likely to promote and provoke feelings of ill-will or hostility between the different communities in Fiji. Further, the motion was inconsistent with the Bill of Rights of the 2013 Constitution. That fact, when you talk about something like that, you ought to tell the full story, Sir. That was his reasoning for not allowing that motion. It is there.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard some very passionate speeches today, but I think it is very important today that we speak freely and everyone is heard. What is being asked of us is that we agree to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mr. Speaker, the truth is this book, the reconciliation is this book, and I will tell you why.

We all take the Preamble in this Constitution for granted but that Preamble tells us that we recognise the indigenous people or the *iTaukei* and their ownership of the land, culture and customs, tradition and language. We recognise the indigenous people of Rotuma, similarly to them, we recognise the unique culture, customs, traditions and language. We also recognise the descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and the Pacific Islands, their culture, customs, traditions and language. We also recognise the descendants of the settlers and immigrants to Fiji, their cultures and customs.

There is another line in there, Mr. Speaker, that basically puts everything to rest and gives us all an equal footing. This Preamble declares that we are all Fijians, united, Mr. Speaker, by common and equal citizenry.

Mr. Speaker it also has a Bill of Rights that protects literally everything. We must respect this book that we swore on. We swore on oath on it. This book is the very reason why we all sit here. This book allows us to have elections. This book allows us to have this particular debate that we are having now, but we must not start by saying in the first 7 months – “Oh! Let’s dig up the past and let us set up a truth and reconciliation committee”.

We don’t even have the ambit of what you are actually trying to put before this Parliament. There were so many parts and parcels to this particular idea that it actually does not make sense. Again, historically Sir, in 2005 also this is during the Qarase Government, there was a reconciliation and unity commission that was proposed by the Government then to be set up.

If the reconciliation tolerance and unity built which was introduced in the Fiji Parliament on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2005 was passed but guess what Mr. Speaker, Sir, that also was shelved because it created havoc amongst the community or they proved it really did. It was going to create problems and animosity in Fiji. What are we trying to do? Are we going to do that again?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will go back to what I said earlier that we as the people are probably the most reconciling human beings on earth in Fiji. We have the ability to talk to each other even by different means. We resolve disputes. We taught the climate change conference how to have a talanoa session and resolve disputes. Why is it that we need a truth and reconciliation committee at a great huge expense? Why is it that all we need to do is protect this constitution adhere to this constitution and rely on this constitution, because we swore an oath on this particular book. This is all we need. There are other ways we can do many things like we do, we are champion around the world for having a system within our cultural system to be able to protect our environment.

Mr. Speaker, every time you set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and this was spelt out by the speakers before, many countries do this, but normally the TRC's they don't have any powers to prosecute perpetrators. They make recommendation and we understand it, to prevent future abuses, but generally speaking these bodies are established straight out of a period of unrest. We have gone out 16 years of no unrest, we have had economic growth in such a phenomenal way.

In a matter of fact, if you look at it in reality sir, in 1987 those who would remember that are probably over 40-plus now, we have such a young population. A lot of healing has gone on. During election time, these racial insults that you talk about now rears its ugly head because it is a ploy that is used, it is not just here but it is worldwide. But deep down inside, the level of patriotism we have in this country right now because of what has been created by this blue book, is unsurpassed, it is unbelievable!

I will share a little light moment with you, honourable speaker. When Fiji plays rugby - just now we played Wales but, unfortunately, we lost and guess what? Every single person in this country was Fijian, we had a gentleman whose name is Hamzad Hussain, he took his little flag from Labasa, and he was in the stadium in France and guess what his sign read? He was so disappointed because Fiji had lost and guess what his sign read (I hope you understand this Hindustani part). He said, "*referee murgi chor*", which means that the referee was a chicken thief.

Patriotism Sir, he did not look at who was playing and who was not playing, it is about Fiji. All of that exists under this Constitution. We are not at a stage where a Truth and Reconciliation Committee is required. The honourable Prime Minister has gone and apologised millions of times already. Any more truth to be told, why do you need the Commission? Why do we need to dig up scars some more? Is that going to heal? No Sir. Like a gentleman who shall remain nameless, who served sometime in prison said to me one day, one minute of incarceration is a lifetime of memory. Is that not enough?

The effectiveness of having a Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TCR) has varied from country to country. The success actually depends on many different factors but all these have not been factored in or it would seem to me that not much thought has been given to the actual motion before the Parliament. Previously, there was a Bill that came first, but again I reiterate Sir, there is no need for us to have a Truth & Reconciliation Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion will effectively divide Fiji again. It is divisive Sir. We have healed a lot. We have a lot of differences here, we carry on with business as usual. We do not need a Truth & Reconciliation Committee here in Parliament because we have got so many differences. Of course, we have differences, this country has gone through and had enough trials and tribulations to last us 20 lifetimes. We have got a phenomenally young population, some (I apologise honourable Prime Minister) do not even know what transpired and they asks us what actually happened?

It is not a lie, that is the truth. We have young people who want to move forward. We start digging up some more, what is going to happen? We are going to be divisive again.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, the experiences that have come out of TRCs have been set up worldwide, I know South Africa did one. It is very hurtful Sir – hurtful to the extent that there are provisions in the Constitution that say you cannot be prosecuted, nor you can be compensated and all of the *coup* perpetrators that did them before all had them. What is the purpose?

If you want the truth, just say it, why do you need the commission? Why do we need to set up a 22 to 30 men commission to do this? What will be the ultimate objective of this particular Truth and Reconciliation Commission especially in light of the fact that you do not need to go any further. This book (2013 Constitution) is the truth, this book is the reconciliation. We all must have the political will and the nous to say we need to move forward. We need to protect ourselves by putting in new laws, new policies and it can be done. You have seen in your time Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have seen some great achievements this week. We have been able to do things with agreement on both sides.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am a son of Fiji, I was born here. My father was born here. I do not need to reconcile with anyone because everyone here (to me) is Fijian. I do not need to tell the truth to anyone because I already have, whether it is good or bad. Sir, there are times when we sit down and we have a conversation awe all hurt but it does not need this Committee for it to be dragged up even if it is history. Sir, our students, our young people, we learn through history that this is something which should not be done. We have healed, Sir.

Yet the things that we need to resolve, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are things like; when you go out and I know some people say and use this particular word, like the word that is used with respect to people saying “*vulagi*”. Sir, I was born here I understand, I understood what you said in the Business Committee Meeting, it may have been brought up in different context but the context in which is being used is actually insulting to us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, all I am going to say is, this is what our sons and daughters need to rely on. Otherwise, Sir, my other half is from Oneata, what are my children going to be called? The former Attorney-General’s children what are they going to be called? We should not be doing that to ourselves. We have a happy medium already here, Sir. With respect to the majority of the population that send us here to do things, yes sometimes we may not agree but most of the time the only people that are best at being Fijian are us.

All of us, not some of us - we are the best at the world in doing many things, Sir. We are the best at the world now being flaunted around the world in many institutes as Fijians having the best way to resolve things, yet at home we need to setup a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to end by saying something in iTaukei, “*kevaka keimami sa vulagi me keimami qai lako tale i vei*” where do we go?

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, serving my third term in Parliament, this motion is perfect and is most suitable for Fiji today. The honourable Prime Minister is celebrating his birthday today and I am around the same vintage, so I have seen Fiji grow. We saw the battle during the Colonial days to decide and to agree on the way forward with our politicians in their time at 60s. Independence came in 1970, the brave new world - I was part of that, we were young, and I have seen Fiji grow from where we are today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I say again, this motion is a must, and we must embrace the provisions and

this motion Mr. Speaker. When I read it, it captures the essence of what I believe should be done in Fiji today to strengthen our community, bring people together, unify us as one. I will read it out again:

“The Parliament agrees for the establishment of a Truth & Reconciliation Commission by the Government to facilitate open and free engagement in truth telling and confront fears in view of conflicting statements and utterances regarding motives behind the political upheavals so that closure and healing for Fiji is achieved and permanently put to rest this unfortunate and turbulent chapter of our independent history.”

We need to do this. As the honourable Kiran has said today and I loved what she said, “this is a beautiful country”. We are a beautiful country, but we need to clean up a number of things to fully realise the potential of this country and enjoy the beauty that we know is there. This motion is presented with humility and the importance of humility is this - it extends more compassion and empathy to others. This presented with humility. You notice the tone from this side of Parliament, the tone that is driving, dictating the leadership in this country today, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Our Prime Minister epitomises the humility and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, he does not hide anything. He has been very open, yes, he has apologised a number of times but here is a leader who hides nothing from his people. Of course, others can do the same for 2006.

We know we celebrated for the last few days about the changes that we saw in this Parliament, the tabling of the Urgent Oral Question which I had shared with you. For eight years, I sat on the other side of Parliament, I remembered the day there was this landslide that almost buried Draubuta in my Constituency at Nadroga/Navosa. I wanted to raise an Urgent Oral Question and I was told that is the business of the Executive, the Legislature has no business asking what the Executive does. These were the principles of separation of powers that prevail at that time but today we know things have changed, the tone has changed. It is true parliamentary democracy, the Executive will not hide anything from the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course yesterday, we withdrew a Bill that we believed based on the presentation from the other side needed a bit more work. We argued for eight years over certain Bills, we knew they were not perfect but not once it have the humility to say “we withdraw it and bring it back”. This is a new tone in the country today and I would urge everyone to buy in, into this tone and do things with humility, accept and embrace the way we bring forward some very important issues that are important to our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I see a lot of emotions today and the emotions confirm to me that we need this Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I remember in the case of the South African TRC – in one case a white policeman was called by the Commission and in the presence of his township, he was asked, “How did you treat these people?” Truthfully, he explained what he did to them, the manner he treated the black people in South Africa. The people could not help themselves and they cried openly, but at the end of all that weeping, they embraced each other because the truth came out. The black people could not believe that the white man who did that to them, would be truthful in a Commission like that. That is what Fiji needs. We know there is a lot of hurt in our country, so we need to bring that out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that it is very difficult to stand in the gap and pull our people together. You ask our colleagues who pulled together and set up the *luvedra na Ratu*, what they had to go through to bring that together. It was not easy, and it is still not easy today. Standing in the gap means it is still not easy, but we need to stand in the gap and pull the people in, and this is one way of standing in the gap. There are some concerns raised by my colleague, honourable Ravunawa, that there could be mistakes, that the motion is not properly worded. But, as enumerated by

honourable Premila Kumar, many of the countries have done this and we will learn from them. Indeed, when we set this up in 2005 and 2006, the South Africans helped us set up what we wanted to do at that time, which unfortunately, did not see the light of day. Please, do not be fearful. It has been done all over the world and we will reach out to whoever, to help us set this up and make sure that it is done properly.

It is this fear of opening up the old wounds, but it was on this side of Parliament that is sweeping things under the rug, and we know that you cannot do that. You have to bring it out in the open for all the wounds left unattended, will fester. It is better to cleanse those wounds and it is political maturity to take on that challenge and do it. That is what we are saying today, the political maturity to do this.

I look at the case of Australia in terms of the natives of Australia. A member of my family is married to a native of Australia and I can relate, and I am very impressed with the way they have improved over the years. A week ago, honourable Kamikamica and I were part of the Fiji Business Council AGM in Sydney. As traditional in Australia today there is this. "Welcome to Country", and it is normally by a native, who are the traditional custodians of the land, who greet you in whatever event you hold in Australia. This lady who gave us the welcome to the country, her name is Aunty Ding, and she has 81 great grandchildren. I say this because I just saw the strength in this woman, and knowing the natives back then some years ago, there is a sense of confidence within the community now in Australia. Indeed, my family who is married to a native of Australia, said that natives of Australia have made great strides over the years. There was a time when we were way ahead of them, but now they are equal to us in terms of education and other areas of human development.

What happened in Australia, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was the acknowledgment by the leadership back in the 1990s that they were not treating the natives well. It used to be harsh harsh but Paul Keating in the 1990s said, we know we did not do this, and that process of acknowledgement Mr. Speaker, Sir, has helped uplift the natives of Australia and of course we remember the apology by honourable Prime Minister Kevin Rudd over the Stolen Generation that all added up to strengthening the native Australians today and into what they are today. They are very powerful people Mr. Speaker, Sir, and what I am emphasising here is the acknowledgement, something needed to be acknowledged and they said about doing, improving the lot of the natives of Australia.

What we need to have in Fiji today is also to acknowledge that there exists in our midst the sense of reservation, the concern that we are not being truthful to each other, that fear, we need to acknowledge that and we need to do something about it and we believe this is the way to do it. As I have said, standing in the gap is not easy, ask those who have tried and we need Mr. Speaker, Sir, to move forward. We need the sense of acknowledgement. We must all agree, we must all acknowledge this. You cannot hide your head in the sand or sweep it under the rug, we have to acknowledge this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have today in my Ministry is an unprecedented level of interest to invest in this country and just yesterday I was called during Parliament sitting to meet some people in the Government Chambers and they just said to me that there is something about this country. We feel a sense of goodwill in this country, there is something here. It is very unique compared to the other parts of the world where they go to and this is our strength Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to build confidence. We know there is still room to develop and being honest with each other, being truthful is the way forward for our country and I must share with you today the investors that we are seeing Mr. Speaker, Sir, are mostly the diaspora of our own people.

Our own people over the last eight months with the new Coalition Government have come back in big numbers to invest in Fiji. This process will confirm to them that we are on the right path,

that yes there is now freedom in this country. There is no more fear, people can come back to where they were born. No one is going to be kept out of this country and we are going one step further to cleanse ourselves of all these fear that has held us hostage for a good many years.

Yes, I agree with honourable Koya, our history goes back to the colonial days, the deed of cession hence the need to cleanse. We are not going to limit the dialogue to 1987, 2000, 2006 it is a whole process of listening to people and that is what will uplift the country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge everyone to accept us. As I said we are not the only one, our neighbours, the Solomon Islanders did this and it worked for them and Fiji there is something that has been hanging over our head for quite some time and we need to cleanse ourselves and move away from being held hostage to old feelings that need to be cleansed. And if I may, Mr. Speaker, let me close with Psalms 133:1: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity".

Sir, that is what we are trying to accomplish here today. To live in unity, in truth and without fear hence the need to set-up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all the speakers that have contributed to this motion. Mr. Speaker, Sir. Much has been said that shows us the need for the set-up of the Commission. Many of our honourable Members from the Opposition side has spoken about bringing out hurts, yet in Parliament they themselves have brought out the events of 1987 during the contribution over the past few months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can only give what we have. Our honourable Prime Minister has reflected on his actions, healed and has been working on making amends for decades. It started with his partnership with NFP Leader late Justice Jai Ram Reddy who was held at gun point during 1987. They shook hands, they forgave and tried to move the nation forward through deep conversations and processes to deliver the 1997 Constitution.

During the consultation for development of 1997 Constitution, I think that would have been the first healing process where I saw submissions being made from all extremes. I have admired the leadership of NFP and the NFP leaders of our past who had the vision to be able to look beyond the pain to see the growth of the nation. I know honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Professor Biman Prasad was also affected by the events of 1987, he also chose to work on building peace.

If you read the life of Ghandi or Nelson Mandela, people we all admire, we learn that path of peace and healing is much more difficult, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is much more difficult to work on and requires a strength of character that is not easy but I am humbled to serve in this Parliament with leaders who have chosen this difficult path. I admire the honourable Prime Minister for his leadership during that time and devastated when I realise the nation was not ready to receive the gift of healing and working together. I know our honourable Prime Minister was committed and kept working on peace building not only here but in the Pacific region, in particular Solomon Islands.

More recently, Mr. Speaker, when I joined politics I have been privileged to be in forums where the honourable Prime Minister has spoken his heart. I have seen in his eyes and his voice a deep commitment to re-building the nation. I know he has been blamed for starting all the problems and he has taken the responsibility and wants to do everything possible to leave this country a better place. The question I often ask myself, why is one person taking the blame? When this must have been a collective work, there were many people involved in 1987 and could have stopped him as well. But he received support for his actions, why? For any plant to grow the ground has to be ready;

- (a) What were the reasons?
- (b) Why was the ground ready for this plant to take root?

(c) What were the root causes?

Have we dealt with the root causes? Sir, maybe not so we kept seeing political upheavals over the years. Is it not time we study these roots to try and eliminate them Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Prime Minister, we can only give what we have, you have been a beacon of hope that you have taken the time to reflect, heal and are ready to help the nation heal by answering the questions. After taking leadership of this nation our honourable Prime Minister has reminded us regularly to lead with kindness, not to be revengeful, raise the bar for leadership and let love shine in all things we do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister has changed the tone of this nation. I have seen the honourable Prime Minister apologise many times and every time I feel very humbled and as a leader and elder, I wish he would not do that anymore and I hope through this process the need for that apology is no more as we will create a process to have everyone's questions answered and heal the hurts.

Mr. Speaker, we are all coloured by experiences from political upheavals, I was too after seeing 2000 and learning from that event made me want to understand the root causes and heal the relationships in this nation. I had witnessed evictions, met rape victims, crime against my people and I was feeling very pained on behalf of my people as I moved around most affected areas during the crisis of 2000. I was angry and blessed to joined the peace process and took the time to look at my stereotypes, to look at the fears of the people, learn the concerns of the people and realise if the communities are hurting. I am very blessed that having a deep desire to work healing of this nation I have been given the opportunity to raise this motion.

I would like to raise the issue of *vulagi* that has been mentioned and has been all over the media and raised in this Parliament today, Mr. Speaker. I wonder those who have commented whether they have listened to the Prime Minister's speech where he allegedly called us *vulagi*. When I listen to the Prime Minister's speech, he seemed he was speaking about himself being a guest in that space, he did not call anyone else *vulagi*, he did not say Indo-Fijians, Melanesians or *vulagi*, he used the word for himself.

We are wounded so we have taken that to hurt ourselves and create more divide instead of looking at the context in which it was spoken and that is what the Commission can do, heal us so that we can look at the context. I remember when we visited Bau to attend the late Roko Tui Bau's funeral with the *Gone Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi* she explained to me that she is a *vulagi*, a guest on the island and there is a traditional door a family we had to go to. They will announce our arrival to the Chief of the land, it is a normal tradition but maybe we have been wounded by the past. Being called *vulagi* in the past and we are still carrying the wound, the leaders have not healed keep amplifying the pain passing it to younger generation. When we are leaders, people hold on to our words thinking we must be telling the truth but some of the truth is coloured by our own experiences and pain.

To address this to the people, leaders have to heal themselves first. From what I have learnt from Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in different parts of the world including Solomon Islands, I strongly believe that we could move ahead for healing of this nation. Create peace for generations to come as we keep narrating to younger generations our pain of the past. 60 percent of this nation was not here in 1987 as mentioned by honourable Koya but young generations tell a story of pain because that is how we related it to them during political campaigns. We must heal so we do not rob our next generation of the innocence, we give them the gift of love of different people in this land. For that we need humility to be able to tell the truth and be able to have the patience to listen to allow time and space to heal so no politician uses this painful events to further their political campaign as we have seen in the recent past.

I thank all the leaders who have contributed and plead with all Members of this Parliament to bless this nation with healing and support the motion to agree to establish the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission. With genuine intentions and right spirit the Commission can deliver peace and healing because we have leaders committed to the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you I wish to thank our Prime Minister I was hoping for his birthday we will have the gift of passing this motion and can sincerely say “happy birthday.” Because I have seen the emotions and the pain he has been carrying that he wants to work on healing this nation and pray that he has a healthy and long life to continue passing his wisdom and luck to this nation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may this nation grow with peace and prosperity with the leadership of our Prime Minister, with that I commend the motion to Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	28
Noes	-	23
Not Voted	-	4

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- If there is truth in that, honourable Koya, then I think you are really excited.

(Laughter)

Honourable Members, upon the agreement of both sides of Parliament, both Committee Reports on today’s and tomorrow’s Order Papers will be deferred for further debate at the November Sitting. The amended Order Paper for tomorrow will be circulated this evening.

As such, honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.23 p.m.