

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2023

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2023

The Parliament met at 9.29 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, honourable F.S. Koya, honourable M.D. Bulitavu and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 21st November, 2023, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome those who are joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. I have noticed there are a lot of new faces in the gallery. I also welcome the students from the following Universities:

- (1) University of South Queensland;
- (2) University of Sunshine Coast; and
- (3) Curtin University in Perth.

They are accompanied by their Lecturer - Dr. Elizabeth Ryan; Elders - Mr. Wanye Fossey and Mrs. Janet Mullenger-Barnard and Directors - Sheila Houston, Ms. Beeca Hancock and Ms. Lavenia Warman who happens to be a former classmate of mine at Dudley High School. Welcome, La, and we welcome your contingent. I hope, Madam Secretary-General would be sharing some time with each and every one of you so as to see how best we can continue with this great relationship.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report – Ministry of Agriculture 2018-2019 Annual Report

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the review of the Ministry of Agriculture 2018-2019 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(c) which mandates the Committee to look into the issues related to forestry, agriculture, mining, environment, fisheries, water and marine services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all support the work undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, given its significance in terms of food and nutrition security and, most importantly, in terms of the social and economic benefits. We thank the Ministry for their commitment and the support provided by Government and all honourable Members of this august Parliament.

Just are few issues that I wish to highlight, I will go straight into some of the key issues that I raised in my foreword, the utilisation of funds. There was a significant increase in funds from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019, about \$20 million plus, but then when it comes to the utilisation of the budget, it was under-utilised, as well for various reasons.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir!

MR. SPEAKER.- I am sorry to interrupt you, are we on the same page here?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, I have presented the report, no one has seconded, so I am taking the

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, I was a bit surprised that you continued.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sorry, Sir!

MR. SPEAKER.- The copy of your text that is in front of me, there is still a lot to be read out, Sir, but you have done the last bit by presenting the report, and that is the ultimate goal here.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that the debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Sir, and my apologies for the error.

Consolidated Review Report – Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to submit to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports.

The Committee noted that Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit's (FFIU) contribution towards building a stronger legal, institutional, operational and regulatory environment on AML/CFT in Fiji that addresses domestic risk of money laundering and complies with the minimum international standards.

In its findings, the Committee noted that FFIU has Memorandums of Agreement in place with several local and international stakeholders which enabled them to exchange information regarding suspicious transactions or possible money laundering activities, gain direct access to FFIU database including second staff with FFIU.

It further noted that in addition to scams, tax evasions were found to be the other top possible underlying criminal activity identified in the Suspicious Transactions Report. Sir, FFIU investigated cases where businesses had not lodged their income tax returns since 2006 and cases where business owners had not registered their business with FRCS.

The Committee expressed its concerns on the increase in online scams, pyramid schemes by using mobile money wallets and international debit cards to facilitate various online scams in 2021 and 2022. Members of the Committee would like to urge the general public to be vigilant and ensure that they do not fall prey to malicious scams of such nature which would lead to losing their hard-earned money and savings. The Members feel that at present there are no coordinated approach to deal with scams and money laundering and that law enforcement agencies need to take action swiftly.

A timely report to FFIU from financial institutions can assist in taking quick action. There is a lack of a single agency taking responsibility for ensuring that these scams are filtered out in its initial stages and exposed to the public. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the Director of FFIU and his team for being prompt in answering the various queries and questions raised by the Committee.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who are part of the team that produced this Report - Deputy Chairperson, honourable Sashi Kiran; honourable Tomasi Tunabuna, honourable Premila Kumar and honourable Semi Koroilavesau.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I submit the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit Annual Reports to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - National Fire Authority 31st July, 2016 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 annual review of the National Fire

Authority Annual Report for the seven-month period ended 31st July, 2016. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Orders 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs was referred the National Fire Authority Annual Report for the seven-month period ended 31st July, 2016 on 17th February, 2023. As per the normal process of report scrutiny, the Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

The Standing Committee would like to commend the work carried out by the National Fire Authority (NFA) in responding to emergencies and being able to perform to its level best. In addition, Mr. Speaker, NFA ensured the effective and efficient provision of fire rescue and emergency services whilst pursuing the completion of its capital projects which are the Korovou, Korolevu, Seaqaqa, Taveuni and Savusavu Fire Stations.

Mr. Speaker, *TC Winston* devastated most parts of the country during that year. This did not deter NFA from playing its key role but continued to assist the emergency partners in providing timely assistance to the National Disaster Management Office.

Mr. Speaker, it is also commendable to note that Government continues to support NFA through capital grants for expansion of its essential services to every community in both the urban and the rural centres. To see firsthand and witness the operation of one of the essential services, the Committee undertook a site visit to three fire stations namely, Korovou, Levuka and Korolevu. The Committee held *talanoa* sessions with officers of the three fire stations and compiled its findings and also sought clarifications that assisted the Committee to make its recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for putting the Report together - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Sashi Kiran, honourable Parveen Bala and honourable Viam Pillay for their invaluable input and support. I would also extend my deepest appreciation to honourable Ketan Lal and honourable Penioni Ravunawa, as Alternate Members of the Committee on several occasions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also extend my gratitude to the Chief Executive Officer of the National Fire Authority, Mr. Sowane Puamau, and his staff 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 all honourable Members to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- May I remind honourable Members to, please, switch off all cell phones when in Chambers.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without a notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report – Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report. The Standing Committee on Social Affairs was referred the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report on 27th March, 2023. As per the process for report scrutiny, the Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through its findings, the Committee commends the work performed by the Public Rental Board (PRB) for the year 2020. It was noted that for the year ending 31st July, 2020, the PRB recorded an operating profit of \$1.5 million in its revenue collection. The PRB has recorded profits in its books, despite the economic crises that significantly impacted on its business. Although it was a difficult year as the global pandemic reached our shores, this did not deter PRB in achieving its mandate which was set 33 years ago, to provide affordable rental accommodation to low income earners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, PRB is evolving and modifying its products and services to adapt to the changing environment. It continues to provide affordable and accessible housing to all Fijians, for instance, upgrading of facilities in Kalabu and on Kia Street, Raiwai, in the Central Division, as well as the development of the three-storey building in Simla, Lautoka, in the Western Division. Sir, new projects for the PRB include Namelimeli in Navua and Waitovu in Ovalau, which are still in the approval process.

The Standing Committee witnessed firsthand the work of PRB and its mandate to develop affordable and low-cost housing for Fijians, despite the challenge of capital funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a new initiative that is still under the proposal phase is the Rent to Own Home Scheme. This Scheme will assist interested first home buyers in owning properties and will assist PRB tenants to graduate from being a tenant to a homeowner. Although the annual review was for 2020, the Committee acknowledged the current data and information provided by the stakeholders. This assisted the Committee in its review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, commend the work that is carried being out by PRB and extend my deepest gratitude to the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Timoci Naleba, and his staff, for their timely assistance in this review process.

I would also like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs – honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Sashi Kiran, honourable Parveen Bala and honourable Viam Pillay, for their valuable input and support in the compilation of this Committee Report. I also extend my deepest appreciation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to honourable Ketan Lal, who was an Alternate Member on certain occasions.

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

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Hon. Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
- (2) Hon. Minister for Health and Medical Services;
- (3) Hon. Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts;
- (4) Hon. Minister for Education;
- (5) Hon. Minister for Youth and Sports; and
- (6) Hon. Minister for Agriculture and Waterways.

Honourable Members, Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, 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.

Creating a Resilient and Sustainable Future for All – APEC Leaders Meeting

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, good morning to you and to the honourable Members and also, to our friends and those interested in the affairs of Parliament and the affairs of Fiji who have joined us in the gallery this morning, and those who are watching the live telecast of the proceedings of this august Parliament; *ni sa bula vinaka*. I trust that life goes on and we are all enjoying it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to start on a solemn note to announce the death of a loyal servant of Fiji, former Secretary to Government, Secretary of the Public Service Commission, Ambassador and even Cabinet Minister, the late Poseci Waqalevu Bune, who passed away early this morning at the Nadi Private Hospital. Earlier this week, we had one of our local daily newspapers highlighting the fact of the number of deaths due to prostate cancer. I would like to reiterate the words of the writers of that article and the doctors who called upon men of Fiji to get clearance, get tested and make sure you are fine.

Our condolences go to the late Mr. Bune's relatives. I was fortunate to be able to divert my return journey on a recent visit to go and talk to him in the RSL Hotel in Lautoka. He sounded very well and strong, but I knew he was not well. So, our condolences go out to his relatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I rise today to report to this august Parliament on my recent participation in the 30th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Week. I was invited as a guest economy by President Joseph Biden - the President of the United States. Fiji is not a member of APEC, but we could be invited by the Leaders of countries that are members of APEC. Last week's meeting focussed on the theme, "Creating a Resilient and Sustainable Future for All".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the premier platform for the United States to advance its economic policies in the Asia-Pacific region has been APEC, for some time. It promotes free, fair and open trade, and advances sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

The 21 APEC Member Economies account for nearly 40 percent of the global population, 50 percent of global trade and more than 60 percent of US goods exports. Additionally, Sir, these economies have investments in the United States estimated at 1.7 trillion dollars and employing 2.3 million American workers as of 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, APEC 2023 brought Leaders, Ministers, the private sector and other stakeholders together, to engage in discussions on the global challenges. The Leaders Meeting provided a platform to advocate for immediate and urgent action to address the impacts of climate change.

I addressed the Leaders on the topic, “Sustainability, Climate and Just Transitions on Energy”. Those who are going to the next COP meeting will be including the honourable Leader of the Opposition because he has been involved in these talks before and will continue this discussion at the COP discussions.

In my address, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Leaders to take affirmative action in terms of trade and investment, aligning our ambitions for a ‘Zone of Peace’. I continue to promote that, Sir. I first mentioned it at the UN General Assembly, and I am continuing to promote the “Zone of Peace” in the Pacific with a just transition towards a sustainable future. Fiji’s emphasis on sustainability, climate, and a just energy transition is grounded in the imperative to protect our people, preserve our cultural identity and ensure economic stability.

Given our high disaster risk profile and limited access to transformational technologies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I appealed to APEC Leaders to aid the Pacific in addressing the immediate and urgent threats of climate change.

Our involvement in events like APEC is not merely symbolic but a strategic and pragmatic approach to advancing Fiji’s interests and our development goals.

During the Leaders Week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also participated in the Investor Forum of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Forum. The discussions centred on collaborative actions to increase private investment in the Indo-Pacific region.

Fiji fully supports the vision of a greener global economy, as articulated under IPEF. That aligns with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, emphasising the need for nations to coexist peacefully and collaborate on trans-boundary issues, including climate change.

Mr. Speaker, to realise that vision and respond to climate change, sustainable investment in infrastructure and innovation is imperative. Our firsthand experiences with the effects of the climate crises, underscores the urgent need for coordinated actions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, investment in resilient trade-related infrastructure, such as the trans-Pacific submarine cables as discussed yesterday by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, is crucial for our economic growth and regional economic integration.

Google commitment to investing in trans-Pacific submarine cables is a promising development, enhancing capacity and fostering economic growth in Fiji and the Pacific region. In line with these efforts, the Government is fast-tracking Fiji's transition to a greener future, mobilising finance for green investments and exploring avenues to de-risk investments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recent launch of Fiji's first (not FijiFirst) Sovereign Blue Bond, the bond issue was oversubscribed three times. We were hoping for \$20 million and \$60 million was subscribed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agreements forged and partnership established through IPEF are pivotal to enhancing our integration into the global economy and advancing the goals of the Blue Pacific Continent. Interestingly, Sir, when I asked the honourable Deputy Prime Minister if he knows how much capital we have locally available, he said that it would be a very good idea if we can do another one, and then another one.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the sidelines of APEC, a bilateral meeting was conducted with His Excellency President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China. That was before I challenged him and President Biden to get together again and talk about peace in the world. I said that when everyone was sitting around, listening, and they all smiled with hope.

That bilateral, Mr. Speaker, Sir, presented a valuable opportunity to enhance our economic and diplomatic ties with China. We have had diplomatic relationship with China since 1973. Before that, we had it with what we now know as 'Taipei' because they were the China when Fiji became independent. But when the United Nations recognised the People's Republic of China as 'China', countries and governments around the world switched their recognition of China from Taipei or Taiwan, to the People's Republic of China, now known simply as China.

China's global initiatives, notably the Belt and Road Initiative, align with our nation's development agenda. President Xi's Global Development Initiative provides a timely call to action, to address the challenges hindering the progress to implement sustainable development goals. We commend China's unwavering commitment to tackling climate change.

Additionally, the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI) stands out as a transformative force that can empower nations to shape their own destinies.

We also support China's Global Security Initiative aimed at establishing a diplomatic and security architecture based on multilateral treaties, alliances and institutions. We intend to participate in those, in our promotion of the Pacific as a regional zone of peace. That aligns with my advocacy for the "Pacific as a Zone of Peace", reflecting our shared vision for global security.

I reaffirmed our commitment to the One-China Policy, the cornerstone of our formal diplomatic relations for nearly five decades. China's recent contributions to Fiji include the COVID recovery package, grants assistance for infrastructural rehabilitation, and the establishment of a regional centre for Juncao Technology, that have been pivotal to Fiji's post-COVID economic recovery.

As we navigate economic challenges, discussions are underway to address our debt crisis responsibly. A key focus for Fiji's sustainable economic growth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the comprehensive upgrade and expansion of our infrastructure, particularly the modernisation of port facilities and shipyards. I anticipate potential collaboration with China in that endeavour, given China's globally competitive shipbuilding methods.

In my capacity as Minister responsible for climate change and environment (for the time being), I expressed keen interest in learning from China's experience in industrial recycling processes, particularly in Guangdong Province, a province we have had a very long association with.

We had a Tripartite Meeting with the Papua New Guinea Prime Minister and the President of Indonesia, President Joko Widodo. On the sidelines of the meeting, we had that meeting and the tail-end of that, I got invited by the President of Indonesia.

The meeting marked a significant step in addressing regional concerns, particularly regarding West Papua. Our discussion with President Widodo focused on fostering dialogue and expressing respect for the sovereignty of States.

Prime Minister James Marape, and I, were recently appointed as Special Envoys to Indonesia by the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders, to go and talk to the leadership of Indonesia about the plights of our kinsmen of West Papua, who are Melanesians like us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, APEC as a multilateral forum, provided the opportunity to hold crucial bilateral even trilateral meetings to promote our nation's interest as well as free, fair and open trade to foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

I extend my gratitude for the support of this august House and look forward to furthering our nation's growth and prosperity through continued engagement on the international stage. There has been a lot of anti-trip comments and I will address that in the motion later on today, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I open the floor to the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate for the reply, it would be remiss of me not to show our appreciation to the great achievement that the country of Fiji has gained. They have been invited to attend the APEC meeting, not as a member but they have been invited and the amount of goodies that you brought back to the country from that particular meeting and the side meeting is something to be acknowledged. So we thank you sincerely, honourable Prime Minister and your Government for that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister, I also wish to pay tribute now, knowing that the late Poseci Bune has also passed on. We do convey our sincere condolence as well to his family for the sad passing of Mr. Bune.

I also wish to pay tribute to the passing of the late Justice Kamal Kumar who, unfortunately, was called home yesterday in the afternoon and we also convey our sincere condolences to the family - his son who is here in Fiji and, of course, to his wife and son who are in Brisbane, Australia. They were sons of Fiji who have contributed significantly, and we are with their families during this time of sorrow.

I also wish to welcome our friends from Australia who are here in Parliament, and we hope that they will enjoy their short stay here in Fiji.

We do appreciate, honourable Prime Minister, the statement that you have made yesterday. I know for a fact that there were some anti-comments, but it is vital that Government, your Office and all the agencies of Government are aware of the trips and the reasons behind it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I say this because when the request was made by Government to cancel last week's Parliament sitting, I raised, "why do we need to cancel this Sitting?"

The reasons that were given by the Leader of Government Business in Parliament said, “Oh, the honourable Prime Minister is attending the MSG Meeting, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting and preparation for COP28”, but in the evening news before that, we have already seen the honourable Prime Minister landing in the Cook Islands. He has had his meeting with the MSG Leaders and, of course, with the Pacific Islands Forum. So, it took place a week before we were supposed to sit which was last week. The COP 28 is going to be happening next week, so we do not see the logic behind it, but we understand the importance of such meetings.

Again, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, this is your responsibility, and we support you because this is beneficial for Fiji. Fiji is punching above its own weight when it comes to our representation in the international forum. You have alluded to it yesterday, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, through Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are small, we do not have much to influence in terms of political power, in terms of economic power, but it is about relevance. How do we make ourselves relevant in the context of the global issues that are happening? Of course, we need to take into consideration our interests, values and perceptions - that is very critical, and you have highlighted on a few of it this morning.

We know how important trade is. We are living in a globalised world where connectivity, not only in terms of trade but customs and traditions, and there are so many impacts that are being brought about by globalisation. So how are we adapting to the changing environment? This is the relevance that I am talking about, Sir.

Multilateralism, at some stage, was questioned, particularly when it comes to the global issues. Is multilateralism still effective? That is where our hope is as small island countries. We have been able to attend G20 meetings. Although not a member of APEC, we have now been invited. This is the level of representation, and it is a challenge for everyone here in this Parliament because when you go to global forums, they see Fiji differently and we need to rise to that and that is a challenge for all of us - the benefits that we get out of it. But when it comes to sustainable development and resiliency, money is not everything. I will say that again, money is not everything. What are the values that we want to protect?

Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, you have been talking about a region of peace. Of course, we need that peace, but how can we have peace when our very life is threatened because of climate change? Your statement in Australia on fossil fuel, particularly coal, compromises our position according to the Suva Declaration which was one of the key issues that we took with us into the Paris Agreement in COP and that also landed up in the text of the Paris Agreement. This is the interest that we want to protect. We need them, but at the same time, let us be honest with the issues that we bring, particularly because we have a responsibility, not only for the people of Fiji, but for the people of the region - sustainability and resilience. That is why our position must always be emphasised regardless of the gains and the benefits which we need because of our development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the same note, I am quite worried that the honourable Prime Minister has decided not to go to COP28. This is a responsibility that he should not and could not delegate. He has to take it by the horn and lead it from the front, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because this is the single and existential threat that is really going to be the biggest worry, not only for Pacific islanders but globally, particularly the Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

We have talked about the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) yesterday and Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ). Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a huge problem about internal displacement and forced migration. That is a biggest concern for Pacific Islanders today. What happens if Tuvalu goes under water? What happens if Kiribati goes underwater? What happens to their sovereignty? What will happen to their migration?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, internal displacement and forced migration are issues that our Leaders should take to COP because it threatens our existence. That is the region of peace that we want. How can we have peace when we are threatened? Human right is about life, we have a right to life and that is the issue that we want to take and fight for, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Our relationship with China is very important - the One China Policy and let us stick to that. It is not that we have neglected it, honourable Minister for Fisheries, it is not that we have treated China as a karate kid. China was with us when all our friends and partners deserted us, so let us maintain the One China Policy.

We are thankful to the MSG for appointing the honourable Prime Minister and Prime Minister James Marape. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we respect the sovereignty. but at the same time, it is our interests and values that we need to bring as well and we wish Prime Minister James Marape and our honourable Prime Minister every success in the meetings with Indonesia.

That basically is what I wanted to say on the motion this morning on the Statement by the honourable Prime Minister. Again, we appreciate the work undertaken by the honourable Prime Minister and the gains that we get out of it, but let us not make compromises, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because in the end, we will be answerable to every Fijian and every Pacific Islander on the issue of the right to life, resilience and sustainability.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition, for that interesting reply in your response to the honourable Prime Minister's Statement.

Just to add on, honourable Prime Minister and honourable Members of the Government side, that is a very humble plea from the honourable Leader of the Opposition – our attendance in the next COP28 meeting and I sincerely hope that that humble plea will not fall on deaf ears. I am willing to step down and not lead my delegation in attending the COP28 meeting because of the climatic issue under IPU so that only two who are in charge of our Executive attend this very important meeting because we are worried about the plight of the Small Island States that has come out quite well in our recent meeting of the IPU in Angola as well.

The plight of our Small Island States is a bit too late, honourable Prime Minister, to go on this emission reduction to 1.5 percent. The target was 2 percent but as we speak and as we contemplate things in these historic meetings, the islands are sinking. Our neighbours are suffering.

Our taking over the Chair of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) by the honourable Leader of the Opposition and heavily supported by the Office of the Speaker is just to show our concern regarding the plight that we are in and I must convey here that we were quite fortunate that the Australian Federal representation, led by the honourable Federal Speaker of Parliament, honourable Milton Dick, and supported by Senator honourable Deborah Mary O'Neil and a few others, that saw to this - raising and registering our concern regarding the plight of our Pacific people.

There are 13 nations in the Pacific, and you have just come back from attending that meeting, honourable Prime Minister. You even attended this APEC Meeting, being invited by the President of the United States, but this is another meeting that all of us who have been attending these side meetings have come to realise that it is a bit too late. The islands are sinking. Our coastlines are sinking. What is there to be done? It can only be addressed in these very meetings that we are supposed to be attending.

We will attend, honourable Prime Minister. But the plea from our side, it is now or never. The islands are sinking, and I plead very strongly to your good Office and to your goodself that our

plea will not be on deaf ears. I thank you and let us move on.

Important Relationship Between Climate Change and Health

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my Ministerial Statement and before I do so, I just want to confirm to this august Parliament and to your good-self, Sir, that the honourable Prime Minister has taken heed of the plea from the honourable Leader of the Opposition and that he will now attend the COP 28 Meeting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet colleagues and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to deliver my Ministerial Statement on the issue of climate change and health.

The relationship between climate change and health is undeniable and well documented such that climate change is now considered a single biggest health threat facing humanity of this century. Climate change contributes directly to humanitarian emergencies over the tropical storms, floods, heat waves, wildfires, rising sea levels, cyclones, hurricanes and they are increasing in scale frequency and intensity. The impacts are already harming health through disease outbreaks, physical injuries and trauma from extreme weather events, forced displacement as mentioned by honourable Leader of Opposition, food insecurity, air pollution and pressure on mental health.

At the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, a number of health facilities have been identified since 2016 to be affected or at high risk from climate change impacts. Health facilities, such as Vatoa Nursing Station, Ogea Nursing Station and Nayau Nursing Station in the Eastern Division; Beqa Health Centre in the Central Division; Teci Nursing Station and Nacula Health Centre in the Western Division; and Saqani Health Centre and Tukavesi Health Centre in the Northern Division are affected by or at risk from rising sea levels.

A number of them have been identified for urgent relocation. Korovisilou Health Centre is amongst our facilities at risk from flooding, while Qamea Health Centre as you would have known, Mr. Speaker, was destroyed by landslide and awaiting the construction of a replacement facility at a new site. Tonia Nursing Station which was also affected by landslide is also awaiting relocation, while the nurses' quarters have been relocated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also note the climate change impact on the environment around our health facilities that have necessitated the need to consider the relocation of health facilities to improve access to health facilities by the local population. Tokaimalo Nursing Station in Ra is planned for relocation because the access bridge to the facilities have been damaged by flooding. Similarly, considerations are being taken for Laselevu Health Centre and Nasauvere Nursing Station in Naitasiri, given the assessed climate risks that exist for the current sites.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to the impact on health infrastructure, every year the Ministry also continues to tackle multiple surges and outbreaks on climate sensitive diseases and leptospirosis, typhoid fever, dengue fever and diarrheal diseases in our population. On the optimistic side, it is estimated that avoiding the worst climate impacts by meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement could save about a million lives worldwide each year and helps prevent 250,000 additional climate-related health deaths per year worldwide from 2030-2050 mainly from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.

On the environmental and health impact within the Pacific region, Mr. Speaker Sir, for Fiji and the Pacific region, the impact of climate change on health is no longer a theoretical proposition, but a visible everyday living reality. The devastation of severe tropical cyclones on human health,

agriculture, environment, national and family economic health, and our social structures are inflicting its toll on our health and wellbeing.

Rising sea levels are infiltrating arable land for farming and physical activity driving people towards processed calorie dense and nutrient poor foods, reducing opportunities for physical activities, thereby contributing further to the NCD crisis and malnutrition status in our communities.

During the visit of the Director General of WHO, Dr. Tedros, to Tonga in 2019, he was shown a playing ground in which Fiji and Tonga played their first 15s rugby test match in 1924, now fully submerged underwater from the rising tides, and unusable – a story not uncommon in our coastal communities!

Landslides from excessive rain have washed away homes and farms, and threatened whole communities that now warrant relocation, and inflicting additional emotional and mental trauma on its occupants.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change impact on health is threefold:

- (1) The direct impact caused by weather or climate extremes, resulting in injuries and illnesses during or after floods, droughts, windstorms and heat waves, and worsening the health conditions of the vulnerable in our communities particularly in the elderly, children and babies, pregnant mothers, disabled, and those with chronic diseases.
- (2) It encompasses the impacts of environmental and ecological alterations due to climate change that impacts the geographical distribution and intensity of communicable diseases that spreads by vectors, rodents, food and water.
- (3) It relates to the diverse health impacts on mental and emotional trauma and stress caused by social disruptions to communities, such as loss of belongings, homeland or natural resources.

In tackling climate change and health, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our health systems are the main line of defence for populations faced with emerging health threats, including from climate change. To protect health and avoid widening health inequities imposed by the impact of climate change, our countries must build climate-resilient health systems.

Acknowledging that the climate crisis is a health crisis and taking its cue from the aspirational vision of the *1995 Yanuca Declaration on Healthy Islands*, Health Ministers of the Pacific have come together over the last three decades to advocate for, plan and promote mitigation and adaptation measures to tackle climate change impact on our health systems and communities.

The 61st World Health Assembly in 2008 endorsed that Member-States should support the work on the protection of human health from risks related to climate change. Since then, a number of critical global and regional mandates and initiatives such as the:

- Madang Commitment of 2009;
- Green Growth Framework for Fiji 2014;
- Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Special Initiative on Climate Change and Health 2017; and
- Pacific Islands Action Plan on Climate Change and Health 2018 have helped to highlight the impact of climate change and health in climate vulnerable regions such as Fiji.

The action plans acknowledge that Fiji like other SIDs are among the countries most affected by a range of acute and long-term risks caused by climate change, and yet make a very small contribution to the overall global emissions. They also presented short-term and long-term actions and indicators along four strategic lines of action - empowerment; evidence; implementation; and resources.

In 2015, the five-year research project titled, “Piloting Climate Change Adaptation to Protect Human Health” (PCCAPHH) undertaken in Fiji and six other participating countries - Barbados, Bhutan, China, Jordan, Kenya and Uzbekistan concluded amongst its findings that Leptospirosis, Typhoid fever, Dengue fever and Diarrhoeal diseases (LTDD) were Fiji’s climate sensitive diseases.

Strong climate change political mandates such as the 2015 UNFCCC Paris Agreement and the 2015 Suva Declaration where the leaders of Pacific Islands leaders called for increased support for adaptation measures that addresses all vulnerable sectors including health, water and sanitation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the COP 26 meeting in Glasgow, United Kingdom in 2021 was an additional step forward in bringing human health to the forefront of climate change work with the UNFCCC for the first time including two key programmes to support countries in developing climate resilient and low carbon sustainable health systems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of slow implementation, unfortunately, despite the high level of political attention and commitments and many countries identifying health as a priority sector vulnerable to climate change, a significant financing gap remains. Necessary actions to safeguard healthcare facilities and build climate resilience are delayed. These actions include:

- (1) Relocation of health facilities that are at risk from rising sea levels, floods and landslides;
- (2) Retrofitting of existing health facilities to become more climate resilient;
- (3) Repairs and refurbishment of facilities affected by cyclones; and
- (4) Reducing carbon emissions from health facilities through prudent utilisation of medical products and improved medical waste management.

At the global level, public and private climate finance have doubled from 2011 to 2020 and is estimated to have reached up to \$940 billion in 2021. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, less than 2 percent of multilateral climate finance goes to health projects, and this needs urgent addressing at global and national level as well. The mainstreaming of health considerations in climate change discussion and considerations at all levels nationally and globally over the last decade have been slower than what is required.

In talking about Fiji’s actions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services acknowledges the work of all the previous governments on this important health determinant and is continuing its effort to address the impact of climate change on the health system and the health of the population in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to talk about the SHAPE project between the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, World Health Organisation as the project implementer and KOICA as the funder with a budget of US\$6.4 million was delayed in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. The pace of the project has picked up and the outputs will contribute to the protection of the health of Fijians from the adverse effects of climate change.

As for the intervention sites, the SHAPE project will be looking after:

- Central Division

Nasoqo Nursing Station, Navunikabi Nursing Station, Naililili Nursing Station, Verata Nursing Station and Nayavu Health Centre.

- Eastern Division
Ravitaki Nursing Station, Talaulia Nursing Station, Tuvuca Nursing Station, Lomaloma Health Centre and Lakeba Subdivisional Hospital.
- Western Division
Kamikamica Health Centre, Kese Health Centre, Nacula Health Centre, Lomawai Health Centre and Vatulele Health Centre.
- Northern Division
Naqumu Nursing Station in Macuata, Udu Nursing Station, Vunivutu Nursing Station, Tukavesi Health Centre and Vuna Nursing Station.

In terms of the list of projects community engagement intervention sites are as follows:

- Central Division
Nasoqo Village, Navunikabi Village, Laucala Village in Rewa, Uluiloli Village and Nayavu Village.
- Eastern Division
Ravitaki Village, Talaulia Village, Tuvuca Village, Lomaloma Village and Lakeba Village.
- Western Division
Vakabuli Village, Kese Village, Nacula Village, Lomawai Village and Ekubu Village.
- Northern Division
Naqumu Village, Vunikodi Village, Sogobiyau Village, Kanakana Village and Kanacea Village.

Secondly, the completion of the climate hazard vulnerability assessment for the 212 healthcare facilities under the Ministry are as follows:

- Northern Division - 46
- Eastern Division - 52
- Central Division - 54
- Western Division - 60

Preliminary reports have pointed to many healthcare facilities around the country that require climate-proofing from the many years of neglect and the Ministry is working hard with the support of our partners to address this infrastructure improvements as it needs. The future, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is taking up the challenge to push ahead and address the issues relating to the impact of climate change on health.

In our engagement in many virtual and face-to-face national, regional and global forums, we are raising our voice and continuing to advocate for multisectoral collaborations and partnerships to address climate change and health for Fiji and the Small Islands Developing States and include the:

- (1) National Climate Change and Health inter-ministerial stakeholder forums;
- (2) Regional Committee Meetings of the WHO Western Pacific Region;
- (3) World Health Assembly;

- (4) Alliance for Transformative Action of Climate and Health (ATACH) – a global WHO-led support for the advance actions on climate change and health at country level. Fiji recently chaired the ATACH Working Group on Low Carbon Sustainable Health Systems.
- (5) Engagement as a Champion Country in the organisation of the first ever “Health Day” at the COP28 Forum in Dubai, UAE, in two weeks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building infrastructure resilience, the Ministry is continuing its health infrastructure improvement through:

- (1) Effective and targeted partner engagement on infrastructure improvements such as the New Zealand Government support of FJ\$2 million, World Bank support of US\$250,000 towards selected health infrastructure support.
- (2) Decentralization of the Ministry’s Minor Works budget allocation of FJ\$3 million to our health divisions to facilitate timely infrastructure works implementation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are feeling the fallout from climate change, from giant tides to flash floods, to stronger cyclones and the impact on health is mounting. Addressing this requires our collective action at national, regional and global levels to protect our lives and livelihoods for now and generations to come.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services will continue to work with the Government’s Climate Change Division, stakeholders, and partners to strengthen our collective response for this important health threat.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor to the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his contribution, I would like, at this point, to adjourn Parliament so we can have morning tea. I hope you will enjoy the company of our guests in the gallery who are here with us and to share a bit more of our role.

As you have all heard from the honourable Prime Minister and I would say that the delegation is quite lucky having to hear it from the horse’s mouth of all the bilateral and side meetings that he has attended and being invited by the President of the United States of America. We now adjourn for tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.43 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.19 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we shall now continue and I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate for their response.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to respond to the Ministerial Statement provided to us this morning by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change has become a fancy word locally, regionally and internationally. Climate change came out during Fiji's Presidency to the COP and aligned to the SDGs and I hear the Ministers in their speeches using the words "climate change" in all their undertaking. So, it is out of Fiji's Presidency to the Paris Agreement that we can create a milestone in the area of climate change.

With regards to the honourable Minister's Statement this morning Sir, climate change, he rightly mentioned comes in many shapes and forms. In fact, climate change posed significant challenges to the Fijian healthcare system including the relocation of facilities in vulnerable areas identified by the Ministry of Health due to sea level rise and landslide and flooding.

This situation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, requires attention from various aspects including funding and disaster resilience. Many of the identified facilities for relocation as alluded to by the honourable Minister this morning are primary healthcare facilities. Again, this poses a pressing concern as rising sea level can damage existing infrastructure. I thank the honourable Minister for identifying nursing stations and health centres that are affected by the climate change Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope that the honourable Minister will be given the critical support in restructuring new facilities and ensuring smooth transition of the healthcare services that are provided in the various stations in the affected communities.

Securing funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for such endeavour is crucial for government and international agencies. The honourable Minister mentioned about KOICA support in the SHAPE Project for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. They play a pivotal role in providing financial resources to support the relocation of health facilities. It is essential to allocate adequate funds to cover not only the construction of new infrastructure, but also essential equipment, supplies and staffing required to maintain the uninterrupted healthcare services during and after the relocation. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, disaster resilience must be a key consideration in designing and constructing new health facilities.

Climate change increase the frequency and intensity, natural disasters like hurricanes, cyclones and storm surges, therefore these facilities should be built to withstand events ensuring the safety of patients, staff, critical medical equipment and also incorporating the features like reinforced structure at a level that will minimise the risks identified and also the robust emergency service system are essential components of disaster resilient health facility. I know that the previous government had adopted the new building code to build back better.

In addition, physical infrastructure, capacity building is also important and the preparedness for healthcare who will be manning the stations. So, the training of healthcare professionals, emergency response team to handle climate health challenges and coordinating with the local communities and authority and developing response plans are vital to ensure the healthcare services can effectively adapt to changing environmental condition.

In addressing the impact of climate change, there is a need for the relocation of health facilities, as mentioned. It encompasses good financial support, disaster resilient, capacity building, stakeholder collaboration, climate change mitigation in various sectors like transport, energy, housing and agriculture which are critical, to strengthen collaboration with health sector on addressing the impact of climate change on health.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an important innovation in multi-sectoral policymaking is the shared practical lessons that are learnt and practised to strengthen action on climate change mitigation, adaptation and health system resilience. In recognising and investing in these key areas, then only we can mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on the medical services and healthcare and ensure the wellbeing of our Fijian community are not affected with the rising sea level in Fiji and other vulnerable region.

I urge the whole of Government, especially the Ministry of Finance, to look into the provision of funding to accommodate the proposed mitigations strategies as alluded to by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

Recent Developments in the iTaukei Land Trust Board

HON. I.VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public who are here at the gallery and those who are listening from home, *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the Ministerial Statement on the recent developments in the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTLTB) in 2023, a year marked by groundbreaking decisions and actions in favour of iTaukei landowning units and tenants.

Mr. Speaker, the Board today has a vision for Fiji, where every iTaukei landowner thrives, where our youth's future is financially secure and where our cultural heritage is firmly preserved. This vision is not just a dream, it is a future that the iTLTB is actively working towards.

Currently, some iTaukei communities face uncertain land ownership, under-utilised economic potential and a need for empowering our youth and landowners. We seriously need transformative actions to turn the tide. Mr. Speaker, in response, we have implemented strategic measures to address these situations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the iTLTB has successfully processed and amended 101 Schedule A and B cases, securing land ownership for iTaukei communities of over 6,660 hectares. This strategic move not only safeguards our land, but also promises substantial annual lease revenue of \$100,915.

Mr. Speaker, our bold venture into overseas investment with Morgan's Financial Limited represents a significant diversification of our portfolio, promising maximum returns and aligning with our custodian responsibilities. As a careful steward, iTLTB is committed to enhancing the financial assets of the landowning units. For this reason, we have chosen to pursue offshore investments as a strategic approach to fund growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have established a sinking fund to empower landowners in acquiring commercial properties, demonstrating our commitment to their financial independence and growth. The sinking fund is designed to assist landowning units in repurchasing leases when they expire, providing reliable financial support system for our landowning units to buy back those leases.

Under this initiative, the iTLTB recently assisted *Mataqali Etuba* of Sigatoka to purchase an expired lease within the Sigatoka Town area. The property was acquired for \$360,000, including a two-storey building in the heart of Sigatoka. Other ventures are being planned with landowning units in Ba, Nadi, Rakiraki, Nausori and Labasa, to become property owners within Central Business Districts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to save iTLTB from the annual rent of \$1.3 million for its Offices throughout Fiji, the iTLTB has moved to acquire its own properties to house its regional offices. Any excess to the Board's need, would be commercially rented out for extra income.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for increased visibility and improved accessibility to our services, iTLTB has initiated the opening up of our sub-regional offices. The first has been opened in Nabouwalu, with others being planned for Keiyasi, Taveuni and Vuda. This initiative will be of great help to numerous tenants around Fiji, who currently have to travel long distances to access our services. Further, the Board, while awaiting the establishment of sub-regional offices, has organised roadshows where customers are able to select their land on the spot and are given their offer letter on the same day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, iTLTB, through its Board, has also approved the increase in title holder distribution to the traditional leaders, including:

- *Turaga i Taukei* – 3 percent;
- *Turaga ni Yavusa* – 5 percent; and
- *Turaga ni Mataqali* – 7 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, iTLTB has shifted the investment of minor's funds from Home Finance Company (HFC) Bank to the Unit Trust of Fiji (UTOF), securing higher returns and ensuring a successful future for our youth. The allocation of 40 percent of these funds for educational and medical needs, while preserving a bigger amount of 60 percent for their adulthood.

Empowering our youth through accessing their funds for crucial educational and medical needs is not just a policy, but an investment in our future. By allowing minors to use these resources, we are not only addressing their immediate needs but also laying the foundation for a healthier and a more educated generation - the foundation of our nation's future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our effort to correct and amend lease boundaries for pine plantations, we have returned valuable overplanted land of 553 hectares to 74 landowning units in the Bua Province, enhancing their economic potential. This was in response to the longstanding appeal of landowning units for the return of overplanted pine land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our collaboration with stakeholders, such as Lion One Limited, has encouraged economic growth, job creation and big returns for landowners. This demonstrates our commitment to sustainable development. On 10th October, 2023, we witnessed the first gold pour at the Tuvatu Gold Mine. The Gold Mine is not just a beacon of hope for our landowners and employees, but also a good source of revenue for our Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the crux of this progressive report may be predominantly landowner focussed, we have also devised a number of programmes of assistance for our tenants. This includes:

- the staggering of premium payment due to financial difficulties faced by the tenant;
- opportunity to stagger arrears if facing economic hardship; and
- tenants are advised to take the opportunity to visit iTLTB Office for any assistance required.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the endorsement of open contracts for iTLTB staff marks a new era of job security and motivation, fostering a more efficient and productive workforce. Aligning with Government policy, we have raised the retirement age to 60 years, reflecting our commitment to our staff's wellbeing and experience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally, our increased engagement with landowners confirms our dedication to our core role. This engagement and dedication demands a robust human resource backbone. The iTLTB has undergone major human resources changes, positioning qualified and experienced personnel in key positions. The Board has also approved a 2 percent reduction in iTLTB operational cost to 8 percent, in view of the forecasted improved financial performance. These measures are not just steps but leaps towards a future where *iTaukei* land ownership and management will contribute significantly to our nation's prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, let us embrace this change, support our youth, secure our landowners' future, improve our services to our tenants and propel Fiji towards a prosperous tomorrow.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement made by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs in relation to the recent developments done by the iTLTB this year, which I really commended iTLTB for, together with its trustees and interim CEO as well as the honourable Minister. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, iTLTB should always stick to its mandate under section 4 of the iTaukei Land Trust Act 1940, which is to administer land for the benefit of the *iTaukei* landowners and that should remain intact. This includes utilisation of *iTaukei* land and also to assist landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister, for he has continued from where the previous Government has left off.

(Laughter)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- *Vinaka*.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- I really commend the honourable Minister for that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen that now, iTLTB has moved ahead to purchase properties for the landowners which I am really delighted for. In the past, the previous Government has started off with land subdivisions for the *iTaukei* landowners. We have seen that in Wairabetia, Tavua, Vuda and lately, in Namata, Tailevu.

In addition, the SEED Fund Grant where landowners have grown wealth from the resources that they own, I really thank the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, together with iTLTB. However, I wish to comment on the honourable Minister's statement in regards to financial security of youth of to indigenous community or the *iTaukei*, particularly on the issue of equal lease distribution.

I believe the removal of equal lease distribution made by the Government is so quick, it should have been treated cautiously by the honourable Minister, together with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, as well as the iTaukei Land Trust Board. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have seen that in the equal lease distribution, at least, some funds are reserved for those who have not reached 18 years. So, once they turn 18, there is something for them. They can use it for their education or to buy what they want.

However, with the current projection that has been made by the honourable Minister, there is no clear indication as to how these funds will benefit the youth of indigenous community or *iTaukei* youth, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Lately, in my area, a *Turaga ni Mataqali* managed to purchase a car from his grandson's savings once his grandson reached 18 years old. He went with his grandson and just purchased a car from his savings.

Those are some of the issues I wish to bring to the attention of the honourable Minister, which I think the Ministry of the iTaukei Affairs as well as iTLTB should look into - the future of iTaukei youth in this country, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Tell them!

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Listen honourable Members!

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to urge iTLTB, together with all the staff, to come up with innovative ideas. I really like this new funding initiative which is available now for landowners in terms of purchasing properties. However, the problem is that there is less capital resources for the landowners. They should go ahead purchase more tractors, diggers and bulldozers. We cannot take the knife and keep on cutting grasses in the village.

(Laughter)

Time has changed, Mr. Speaker. During their time we used cane knives. Now with our age coming up we need tractors.

Now the cooperatives in Ra we thank the honourable Manoa Kamikamica for giving us a new tractor for our cooperative so that it goes with the time.

MR. SPEAKER.- Is that the second tractor?

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, again I thank the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs for his Statement this morning.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niudamu, thank you for acknowledging the second tractor.

(Laughter)

Appointment of the University Review Committee
by the Higher Education Commission of Fiji

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow honourable Members of Parliament and ladies and gentlemen: I warmly greet you all this morning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to brief this august House on the recent appointment of the five-member University Review Committee by the Higher Education Commission in Fiji on 5th November, 2023. This independent intentional and comprehensive evaluation of universities is done to ensure that our Government commitment to world-class education is not only in words but also in

action. There are legislations that we are bound by, and it is through those legislations that this comprehensive review will be completed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the appointment of the Review Committee Members was based on consultation and recommendations of the Higher Education Commission of Fiji in line with the Higher Education Act 2008. The purpose of the University Review Committee is to assess and evaluate the overall performance, progress and quality of a university including its educational programmes, faculties, facilities and administrative processes. The Committee ensures that the university is meeting its educational objectives and maintaining academic standards and it may also make recommendations for improvements and changes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is well-documented that a university review should take place regularly to ensure that the institution remains aligned with its goals and objectives. The frequency of these reviews will depend on the specific needs and requirements of the university and are often conducted every few years or on a cyclical basis. In Fiji this review has lapsed due to COVID-19 that impacted the university review in several ways.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pandemic has led to widespread disruptions in higher education including shifts to online learning, changes in enrolment patterns and financial challenges. Part of this review will also need to consider evaluating the university's response to the pandemic and its ability to adapt to the changing circumstances. The terms of engagements of the Committee I have been advised by the Board Chairperson that the review will be completed six months after their appointment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Higher Education Commission of Fiji is mandated under Section 7 of the Higher Education Act, 2008 to register, review and renew the registration of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) including the three universities offering post-secondary qualifications and training in Fiji. Under Section 9 of the Act and Section 36 to 45 of the Higher Education Regulation 2009, and institutions registered with the Commission shall be reviewed for quality assurance periodically.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Committee was established in accordance with the following provisions of the Higher Education Act 2008 and Regulations 2009.

“The Commission under Section 8 of the Higher Education Act can establish Committees consisting of its Members and other people it considers appropriate to assist it in the performance of its functions and under Section 12(4) of the Act the Commission may occasionally appoint such other officers, employees, consultants, agents or other personnel as it thinks fit for effective performance of its functions.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the position of the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Commission of Fiji that any review of the Higher Education Institutions cannot be done in isolation of the industry and consumers. Industry and consumers are core stakeholders and beneficiaries of Fiji's Higher Education Sector. In other words, consumer and industry perspectives on the experiences of how they have benefitted and we would like to see the future of Higher Education Institutions in light of the dynamically changing labour market and consumer expectations. The latter is imperative because Fiji aims to develop its TVET sector.

Consumers have had a negative perception that TVET is not an area of consideration for children. This review therefore aims to hear from parents, guardians, teachers and stakeholders and ensure that we have a clear awareness programme that create industry-demanded pathways for graduates of the TVET programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, historically it is viewed that Higher Education Reviews have become academic-oriented or academic-focussed with committees dominated by academics. In such

committees there is little or limited weight given to industry and consumer perspectives and expectations and such reviews are abstract from reality and practice.

Higher Education Institutions need to produce graduates that meet consumer and industry needs, enhance consumer and industry welfare and impact public policies in more than one way. For these reasons, Fiji's Education Review Committee is different and departs from ancient thinking. The Committee is broad ranging: it has only two academics, it consists of civil society representatives and experts that not only represent industry, but it also captures consumer perspectives. The Committee's composition is fair and therefore, innovative and unique and sets a new approach to reviewing institutions.

Equally importantly, the Terms of Reference allows the Committee to consider and appoint technical subject advisors to assist in reviewing and assessing programme materials and learning resources. It is envisaged that the Committee will use its power intentionally to promote the quality of its works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just briefly allow me to introduce the Committee Members:

(1) Committee Chairperson: Professor Simon Wilkie, Monash University

Mr. Wilkie's career spans a remarkable array of roles extending beyond the Higher Education sphere including appointments as Chief Economic Policy Strategist at Microsoft Corporation and Chief Economist with the US Federal Communications Commission.

In 2019, Professor Wilkie joined Monash University from the University of Southern California where he was Professor of Economics in the Department of Economics and Professor of Economics, Communication and Law in the USC Gould School of Law. He was previously head of USC's Department of Economics and the USC Centre for Communication Law and Policy.

He is a member of the editorial board of the International Journal of Communication and a former member of the editorial board of the Journal of Public Economic Theory.

(2) Member: Professor Paresh Narayan

He is a Professor at Monash Business School. He is the President of the Asia-Pacific Applied Economics Association, Editor-in-Chief of Emerging Markets Finance and Trade and Managing Editor of Bulletin of Monetary Economics and Banking.

Professor Narayan is a consultant to multiple organisations, including Bank Indonesia, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Asian Development Bank, Development Bank Institute, Commonwealth Secretariat, AusAID, South Pacific Commission, Forum Secretariat, UNDP, ILO, Solomon Islands, National Provident Fund, Central Bank of Solomon Islands, USP, and Economic Research Institute of ASEAN.

(3) Member: Mr. Joel Abraham, CEO of Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission

He is well known to all of us. His journey through the Fijian education system demonstrates the quality and potential of our national education framework. He holds two Masters degrees and three postgraduate qualifications, providing a broad perspective on various educational aspects.

As a Chartered Accountant, Mr. Abraham brings critical financial insights to the committee. He has extensive experience in governance and is the Chairman of the Pacific Corporate Governance Institute (an IFC/DFAT initiative). He is also a member of the

Australian Institute of Company Directors and has served on boards like FNPF; former Chairman of FNPF hotels and Fiji Meats Board.

- (4) Member: Ms. Seema Shandil, the Chief Executive Officer of the Consumer Council of Fiji
Ms. Shandil's role is to achieve the Council's vision - to build a society of informed and responsible consumers in which everyone is treated fairly, obtains value for money and can exercise their consumer rights. Ms. Shandil has had 28 years of experience as an educator with the Ministry of Education. She has held a lecturer position at Fiji National University, an Economist at the Reserve Bank of Fiji.
- (5) Member: Dr. Emily Yalimaiwai, the Director of Strategy Operation and Culture Fiji.
Dr. Yalimaiwai has worked in the public sector in Audit and Finance for many years and for the last 11 years with the Fiji Revenue & Customs Service. During her time with the Service, she expanded her project management and technological skills. Dr. Emily is a former Director of Strategy Operations and Culture Oxfam in the Pacific, Chief Information Officer.
- (6) Member: Mr. Rex Stephen Horoi
Mr. Horoi is a former Diplomat who served as a Solomon Islands Permanent Representative to the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 1992-2000 before returning to the South Pacific to head one of the largest Civil Society Organisations in the Pacific Region, the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific International (FSPI).

Mr. Rex Horoi has maintained an interest in higher education since serving as the Director of the Solomon Islands College for Higher Education (SICHE) before his diplomatic appointment to the United Nations. He upholds and promotes the implementation of critical thinking, ethical leadership and practical entrepreneurship to be embedded in our education ecosystem.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the criteria for review process that was given to the Committee include:

- (1) evaluation of the institution's vision and mission;
- (2) scrutiny of the Annual Reports to understand institutional challenges, progress and milestones achieved;
- (3) review of the structure and content of the Study Programmes and teaching and assessment strategies;
- (4) assessment of the available facilities for staff and students to ensure a conducive learning and teaching environment;
- (5) investigation into the institution's quality assurance and quality control.
- (6) review of practical attachments or internships offering students real-world experience.
- (7) evaluation of staff qualifications, staff competencies, and other staffing matters. Review admission requirements to ensure fairness, transparency and alignment with the institution's academic goals.
- (8) assessment of the status of research work, scrutiny of internal review and evaluation procedures to ensure continuous improvement and self-assessment.
- (9) examining fees, charges and other financial obligations to students. They may also have to consider any other matters that may be relevant for the assessment and impact the institution's quality standards.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the methodology of the review will include:

- (1) Data collection and assessment of the current status;
- (2) Consideration of self-assessment by institutions;
- (3) Compilation of desk review;
- (4) University visits and engagements;
- (5) Stakeholder consultations; and
- (6) Compilation final report with necessary recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have outlined clearly to this august Parliament, the appointment process, the purpose and the intention of the University Review Committee

I wish to emphasise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Ministry of Education will continue to engage with our universities and our regulator (the Higher Education Commission of Fiji) to ensure that we build our capability to world class standards. I believe this review exercise, the critical legal requirement that will enhance our strengths as well as one of learnings of areas that we need to work more collaboratively in and this review process is part of the commitment to ensuring that we remain relevant and competitive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, I wish to extend our deepest appreciation to the members for agreeing to be part of this process and we look forward to receiving a comprehensive report when the review is completed in six months' time and we anticipate the cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders in this process.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to respond to the Ministerial Statement delivered by the honourable Minister for Education and I thank him for his Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, external reviews are good intentions for tertiary education in nation building, however, fundamentals need to be corrected first otherwise it is the same as building a roof without the foundation. The roof will continue to collapse, the fundamentals or imperatives that I want to talk about is Higher Education Commission Fiji and the composition of expertise of the review committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Higher Education Commission Fiji is to be partly responsible for the issue that we are faced with today. They regulate quality and relevance in the country. I want to ask the honourable Minister to first review the effectiveness and performance of Higher Education Commission Fiji and see they are operating within their mandate. At this point in time, I want to draw attention on the requirements to be a Commission Chair at Higher Education Commission Fiji. The Act is very clear that one should have post graduate qualifications and tertiary education experience. Does the current Chair meet the requirements?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need someone as chair of Higher Education Commission Fiji with good qualification and vast tertiary education experience because the Commission has fundamental responsibilities which include establish national standards for different qualifications, oversee the review process of higher education institutions, provides assurance that the programme developed by the institutions meet national standards, foster cooperation amongst higher education institutions and linkages between Higher Education Institutions and Industry, maintain a database of higher education information. So honourable Minister Sir, your intention to carry out external review of the three universities is good for the country, but please fix Higher Education Commission Fiji first which is an imperative to review three universities.

I also feel that the Higher Education Commission Fiji should align the progression of students from secondary schools to the universities. This week, I saw a handing over of a report of the scholarship and a way forward plan for three to five years by Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Service (TSLS). Out of interest, I googled and found the report.

The report is done by an international expert. The report is crystal clear that quality and relevance is the big issue in the programmes offered by the three Universities. The employment market information is showing that the programmes offered by the universities are not relevant or are outdated and do not match the unfolding and emerging skillsets required in the country.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What else?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to express my concern on the composition of the Committee to review universities namely; the University of Fiji, Fiji National University and University of the South Pacific. The academic members come from only Australian University, Monash and who are both members of the same school of this institution.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. H. CHAND.- There are many other renowned universities in Australia...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Which one?

HON. H. CHAND.- ...which are highly ranked. Why are both members of the Committee from the same university? How was the Committee chosen? How will they assess the broad range of discipline and programmes offered by the three universities? It is a matter of concern. Moreover, Monash and Fiji National University are tied up in a project. Here is a clear case of conflict of interest and inherent bias in the choice of Monash University staff to carry out a supposedly independent external review.

The members on the Review Committee lack university governance experience, quality assurance knowledge and experience. I have also noted from the honourable Minister's presentation that no one has been a Vice Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor and the Committee also lacks expertise in the labour market. Honourable Minister, my suggestion is to have a serious review of Fiji Higher Education Commission and relook at the composition of the Review Committee.

Establishment of Fiji's National Anti-Doping Organisations

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Members of Cabinet, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; thank you for the opportunity to make my Ministerial Statement. Before that, I wish to take this opportunity to wish Team Fiji well as they participate in the 2023 Pacific Games in Honiara. I also wish to thank Fiji's Honorary Consul in the Solomons, all our Fijian population living in Honiara and the Fiji Military Forces for supporting Team Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thought you were in the Solomon Islands.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- He just flew in this morning.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am honoured to address this noble Parliament by providing an updated report on the establishment of Fiji's National Anti-Doping Organisation

(NADO). The main objective of NADO is the proper implementation and compliance of the world anti-doping agency code on creating a more accountable framework which will provide strategic direction, guide and monitor clean sports and sports development in Fiji.

The NADO will ensure that the rights of clean athletes is protected and that clean sports is promoted and practiced at all times. Doping undermines the fundamental values of sports such as health, fairness, commitment, integrity and equal opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given our geographical size, the sudden influx of illegal substances in Fiji has increased. It is only a matter of time that athletes will resort to using illegal substances to enhance their performance in their respective sports. Doping is deceptive and harmful to athletes as it diminishes the sanctity of clean sports and undermines the rights of clean athletes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the budget allocation for Youth and Sports Development provides the necessary resources to establish the NADO and progressively as part of the Ministry's strategic plan to equip us with the infrastructure, personnel and testing facilities required to effectively carry out its mandate. The NADO is a new initiative and is independent to an extent of its operations. A budget of FJ\$386,700 was approved from the 2023-2024 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are currently finalising the recruitment for a coordinator to:

- (1) coordinate and assist the establishment of the NADO;
- (2) develop, implement and update anti-doping policies and procedures in accordance with international standards and regulations; and
- (3) develop and deliver educational programmes to athletes, coaches and support staff regarding the consequences of doping, the importance of clean sports and the anti-doping rules.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, the NADO Working Committee has engaged an expert consultant who has already assisted in the completion of the outstanding 17 corrective actions by the World Anti-Doping Agency. These corrective actions are critical in ensuring Fiji's participation at international sanctioned tournaments such as the Rugby 15s World Cup that just recently concluded. With the completion of the corrective actions, the World Anti-Doping Agency has given us until mid-2024 to successfully formalise the establishment of the National Anti-Doping Organisation and NADO Bill and the Ministry is working closely with Drugs Free Sports Fiji to facilitate this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an important aspect of this exercise is the development of the NADO legislation. This is currently under review with the Office of the Solicitor-General and the World Anti-Doping Agency hence after the legislation has been finalised by the Office of the Solicitor-General, a public consultation will be conducted prior to Cabinet approval.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is an unprecedented development, not only for Fiji but for the Pacific with the central and specialised organisations to support law enforcement and regulatory agencies in Fiji. The rights of clean athletes will be protected, and clean and fair sports will be effectively promoted and practiced.

With Fiji taking the lead in sports development in the Pacific, establishing NADO will enhance our position and reach to the Pacific region. Fundamentally it will protect the right of athletes to participate in doping free sports and thus promote health, fairness and equality for our athletes.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to pay tribute to the late Mr. Sitiveni Moceidreke. Mr. Moceidreke participated in the 100 yards and 200 yards in the 1960 Rome Olympics. In 1962, he also participated in the Seventh Commonwealth Games. Mr. Moceidreke is from Viseisei, Vuda, and we take this time to honour him for his contribution to sports in Fiji. We wish the family all the very best, for a life so important to Fiji in the name of sports.

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

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have labelled our response to the honourable Minister's Ministerial Statement as titled "Clean Athletes, Clean Sports for a Safe and Peaceful Community".

In 2010, Fiji became the 150th nation to ratify the UN Treaty against the practice of doping in sports. Since then, much has progressed and has been done by the previous government. So, I am so thankful to the Government and the honourable Minister's update and statement today to complete the exercise.

Our Olympics stature, Sir, in the Olympics we have gained two Gold and one Bronze through clean athletes and clean sports. In our response this morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have extracted three important thoughts:

- (1) Sports as a nation builder;
- (2) Sports as an industry; and
- (3) Sports as a foreign policy tool.

So, the establishment of this National Anti- Doping Organisation for Fiji is timely indeed.

Sports as a nation builder, the next or the future generation, if they are well and clean, we have a degree of certainty for our future. When I say clean, they are healthy, they are not into all sorts of other things to keep them clean.

Sports as an industry, this can become as we have witnessed as a major export commodity. We have witnessed that through remittances and we continue to see that in the future if we are able to direct the right energy and resources in ensuring that our commodity in this particular case, our athletes are clean. There will be a greater demand for much more Semis and so forth, to name one in this particular industry in sports.

Sports as a foreign policy tool, there is huge potential in sports as many other countries have used to use sports as the basis of establishing, promoting and sustaining good relationship. We have a huge potential in this particular area, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for peaceful relations which we have heard the honourable Prime Minister talking about a peaceful zone, the Pacific region which is peaceful Fiji can contribute to this in a major way through clean athletes and clean sports.

As we sit this morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we heard from the honourable Minister conveying, we also would like to convey our best wishes and congratulations to team Fiji in Solomon Islands, especially those that have progressed into team sports, semi-final status, those that have one medals and for me, in particular, as the president of Basketball Fiji both the men and women's teams are playing well. I am sure the men are now in the semi-final status. We look forward for a successful outcome of their games.

MR. SPEAKER.- Congratulations to the team.

Dairy Industry in Fiji

HON.V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this morning to speak on the Dairy Industry in Fiji and the support that Government offers to the Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited. Before I move into the statement proper, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to respond to some of the issues raised by my colleague, honourable Sachida Nand, yesterday regarding subsidies. Subsidies are also offered for non-sugarcane crops like rice, cassava and dalo and also for ginger for the purchase of fertilizers and chemicals. We are looking to extend that to other commodities in the next budget.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I talked about beef cattle, but today it is about dairy. It is still the cattle business anyway. The dairy industry in Fiji is one of the critical agro-based industries that supports a significant number of farmers and farming families in the production of milk on a small and large scale. Government has a vision for a dairy sector that not only meets the nation's milk demands, but also as a future strong player in Fiji's socio-economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we move forward, we plan to increase milk production, reduce the milk import bill and expand the export base for milk and dairy products. Let me say that there is a huge potential for investment in the dairy sector as we rely heavily on imports to meet our domestic demand. In 2022, Fiji's milk production was around 12 million litres. While we imported around 7.2 million litres with a total national demand at around 22 million litres of milk.

Mr. Speaker Sir, as I have already alluded to, our vision is for the industry to expand beyond the borders of Fiji, with a commitment to position Fiji-made dairy products internationally beginning with our neighbouring Pacific Island Countries. Export opportunities include a diverse range of dairy products that focuses on value addition to meet the demands of consumers

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways has its core role to support the dairy industry. To that end, the Ministry has allocated funds through a grant of \$5 million to the Fiji Co-operative Dairy Company Limited (FCDCL) for that very purpose - to improve the supply and quality of milk from our farmers. This grant support to FCDCL, apart from other interventions, is meant to address the fundamental issues facing the industry.

The Ministry is committed to assist farmers through the provision of support services in collaboration with FCDCL on areas such as capacity building, infrastructure development, breed improvement, nutrition improvement, price incentive, feed subsidy, farm development, milk cartage and provision of veterinary and extension services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of Parliament, the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture will elaborate on the Breed Improvement Programme for the dairy industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a sum of \$2 million has been released by the Ministry for the following activities by FCDCL:

- Operation and support for stock import;
- Milk price top-up per litre to sustain costs;
- Cartage of milk from farm gate;
- Pasture establishment;
- Top 40 supplier subsidy on milking machine;
- Semi intensive machinery purchase incentive and water reticulators;
- Recruitment of Dairy Advisory Officers; and
- Hire of a registered Veterinary Officer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FCDCL bears the cost that is incurred in the milk collection process that directly benefits the smallholder farmers. This grant which pays for the collection costs allows milk cartage contractors to collect and cart raw milk to the chilling centres. Currently, a total of 230 farmers are assisted with this provision, and so are new farmers who are willing to supply milk to the chilling centre.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, livestock feed, such as soya bean meal and mill-mix is subsidised where farmers pay one-third, and the grant contributes two-third of the cost. This subsidy is based on the farmers' milk production, considering the number of milking cows and calves. A total of 368 farmers will be assisted - 240 from the Central Division and 128 from the Western Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recruitment of the four Dairy Advisory Officers in the Central Division will further strengthen the extension advisory services to the dairy farmers. Their role includes assisting and advising farmers on good husbandry and management practices, such as calf rearing, feeding, breeding, recording and offering training for dairy farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Veterinary Officer based at FCDCL will ensure that veterinary services are provided to the industry stakeholders in a timely manner. The Veterinary Officer will also be able to guide the Dairy Advisory Officers in performing minor surgeries and administering veterinary medicine. This position will also ensure smooth collaboration with other agencies, in particular, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji and the Ministry of Agriculture on the importation of dairy cattle.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the nutrition assistance will provide packages for farmers to invest in pasture establishment. The package will assist in land preparation, provision of fertilizer at a cost sharing basis and a total of 50 hectares of improved pasture is to be established under this activity. Better quality pasture would mean better quality milk and increased milk production.

As Minister for Agriculture, I am also advocating the mass planting of juncao grass on a large scale for use as feed for livestock, especially in the intensive rearing, as alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister in his earlier speech. Mr. Speaker, Sir, juncao grass is high in crude protein value and can be stored as fodder for a variety of livestock.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for price incentive, all farmers will be paid 18 cents per litre top-up on their current production, effective from 1st August, 2023 on a weekly basis. In the past 10 years, farmers were paid below their cost of production. Thus, the industry was not able to recover. The 18 cents top-up will lead to sustainable income for farmers, which will enable them to reinvest into their farms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, farmers will also be assisted with some incentive and water reticulation packages to increase and also improve quality of milk. Farmers will be assisted with line and portable milking machines, to reduce labour cost from hand-milking, and water supply materials for maintaining hygiene and quality of milk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to support the dairy industry through FCDCL and work closely with the industry stakeholders, such that the industry benefits all dairy farmers and the Fijian economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver this Statement. *Vinaka vakalevu*, thank you and *dhanyavad*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for lunch. When we return, the honourable Leader of the Opposition or probably the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture will be elaborating more on the breeding aspect of dairy cows. Yesterday, was to do

with beef, today is dairy - we are using the same bulls, I think.

(Laughter)

The Parliament is adjourned, honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.34 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.28 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we shall continue. Is the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture going to make another statement?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, I request to present it on Friday.

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

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I contribute to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister, I would like to pay tribute to the late Chief Justice – Justice Kamal Kumar, who passed away in Suva yesterday. Justice Kumar served the Judiciary, the nation and the people well and his contribution to the society is well noted. Our condolences to his grieving family. May God grant him eternal peace and may his soul rest in peace.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the dairy sector, like the honourable Minister has said, holistic approach to the improvement of dairy is needed, and I am glad that this year, the Ministry has done a holistic approach. They have contributed to animal health, animal feed, farm management, et cetera.

I was taken aback at the honourable Minister's production figures. He mentioned that in 2022, they produced 12 million litres of milk. In Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited (FCDCL), I know the production figure. Somehow, I think there was an error in their figure. I think they said they produced 6.07 million litres. In 2023, they are expecting 5.39 million litres; in 2024, they are expecting 5.99 million litres (according to their draft Business Plan); and in 2025, they are expecting 7.05 million litres. So, 12 million litres is way above the target. I do not think the production is 12 million litres.

Leaving that aside, this assistance in the dairy sector cannot be here for a year and then left - it has to be continuous. There may be a selection of farms, you assist for one year and monitor it for another two to three years. The monitoring and evaluation of farms is missing.

Extension Officers or Dairy Advisory Officers which the honourable Minister has spoken about, need to be on the farm. They need to monitor all these assistance. It is Government and taxpayers' money that is going to the dairy industry, so it has to be monitored.

I know many farms where the barbed wire and fencing posts have been given to them but are still lying on the farm and has not been used. So, the taxpayers' money has to be well utilised. Also, it has to be a controlled assistance so that assistance had to be given in phases. They complete one phase, then the other assistance should be released.

When assistance is given to the farmers, I would request the Ministry that the full assistance reaches the farmer. Part of it should not be taken as administration expense or a markup by the person delivering that assistance to the farmers. So, if feed is bought at \$5 or \$6 a bag at Flour Mills using Government funds, it should reach the farmer at \$5 or \$6 a bag, not at \$8 or \$9 a bag, making of margin in between. The assistance is directed to the farmers and the farmers should receive it.

The FCDCL which the honourable Minister has talked about, is a small organisation and according to their draft Business Plan, their salaries and wages budget is \$450,000. It is quite big for a small organisation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, uniforms, for example, is \$9,000, so on an average it amounts to \$400 to \$450 per person. I do not think they are buying blazers, ties and everything, so it is quite exorbitant. That needs to be controlled. This money should be directed to the farmers so that they

can increase production, not used exorbitantly as administration expense.

I hope that the \$5 million which the Government has allocated, every cent of that \$5 million reaches the farmer and the dairy farmer benefits because they need the assistance. They need Government support, and they are willing to increase production, provided we assist them.

I, again, thank the honourable Minister for Agriculture for allocating that \$5 million in his Ministry to the dairy industry, and I hope to see the dairy industry grow.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Banning/Regulating Pornographic Sites in Fiji (Question No. 172/2023)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

There are some reports that have linked the increase in sexual related crimes to pornography. Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament if there are plans to ban or regulate pornographic sites in Fiji?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Tuinaceva for his excellent question.

Mr. Speaker, when I first saw the question, what immediately came to my mind was, how have we got into this situation where this sort of questions are being asked in Parliament? Why are we asking this kind of questions? Sir, in other words, what were the other people doing before we got to this stage?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Oh, come on! Just answer the question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You can talk about pornography, you can talk about drugs – all the social ills that we have inherited in the last 16 years, Mr. Speaker. That is why when I talk about rebuilding Fiji, it is not only the economy, but there will also be a social rebuild and a moral rebuild that has to happen in Fiji. As Michelle Obama said, “When they go low, we go high”, so the answer to the question, Sir, is my attempt at going high.

Firstly, I would like to thank the honourable Tuinaceva, once again, for a very serious question and it is a question that I rise to respond to, it is a very important question and it is a major problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am also mindful that the relationship between pornography and increased sexual-related crimes is a complex and much debated topic as it sparks privacy, freedom of expression, security censorship, technological and individual liberty considerations.

With that being said, this warrants the nation’s attention, and I am sure that there is consensus, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on both sides of Parliament that any crime, including what is being discussed here today which is sexually related crimes are a major concern, including the potential harms of excessive pornographic consumption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the permission of the honourable Prime Minister, I will be tabling a proposition to Cabinet, to create a nationwide taskforce perhaps, on a bipartisan basis to address this issue.

Just some information, Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding web traffic to pornographic sites, the information is both, instructive and somewhat concerning. For one network provider in Fiji, Sir, over the past three months, there has been about 626.13 terabyte of data consumed which was related to adult content and porn alone, ranking as one of the top 10 most used data traffic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put this into context, the 626 terabytes of data is approximately equal to the amount of data stored in a 100 million books. For a period of one month, from another network provider in Fiji, they found that the total data content was 92 terabytes, which was about 1.6 percent of their total data volume for one month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, effectively tackling these social ills requires a concerted effort and multi-stakeholder engagement targeted at addressing the root cause including increased education and awareness campaigns to our people on developing healthy attitudes towards sex, including importance of consent and what it means. That is what we intend to prioritise, Sir, through Cabinet approval. We will carry out these consultations on a bipartisan basis with diverse stakeholders to ensure that we identify the root causes and assess the solutions available and agree on an approach to address this holistically.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are emerging technological solutions that can be considered as part of our assessment, such as filtering systems which can block child sexual exploitation material or upcoming technologies that are still evolving such as age verification or age assurance systems whereby access to explicit content is not accessed by children.

We are also mindful that there are ways to by-pass restrictions or blocking, for example, by using proxy servers or VPNs, you can access blocked websites through mimicking access virtually from another country of all websites including blocked content. So collectively, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to identify the appropriate interventions that will address the root cause.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the different approaches, that we are looking and in partnership with the Ministries, Online Safety Commission, the Police, Civil Society Organisations, NGOs, the private sector and of course, Members of the other side, we can turn the tide on this societal blemish. With these few words I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to contribute on this very important question. I thank you.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very important question, and it is not about going high or low. It goes to the level where our young people are affected. Recently, there was an article in one of the local newspapers where there is an App. called “Telegram” and nude images of young girls have been shared on that platform. This was reported to the Minister for Home Affairs, the Police Force, but since this question has come to Parliament and there are many people also hearing us ask this question and get a response from the relevant Minister.

Will the honourable Minister consider immediately getting the networks to ban such Apps. which are sharing nude contents of young females who are traumatised and who are at the verge of committing suicide because of their images being shared by these criminal offenders online, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I hope the answer was very clear. You cannot just go around unilaterally, you may have done that in the past, in your Government, but in

this Government, we consult. These are very sensitive issues that need proper consultation.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. K.K. LAL.- It is not a matter of consulting.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- They need proper consultation. We are inviting you. You did nothing for 16 years. You did absolutely nothing on this issue. That is why we are here.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is why we have ended up here. They have done nothing. Honourable Lynda Tabuya had mentioned in Parliament many times and you did nothing! Shame on you!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You are asking us to fix your problem. All I am saying is, let us work together on it. We will do consultations.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Scam taskforce.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You should listen, you will learn a few things. You are young. What I am saying is that we will actually work together on this and come up with concise solutions for the betterment of the country and I hope that the other side will actually put their hand up and let us work together on it because it is a very serious problem.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I apologise, I have been having a little bit of a hearing problem today, so I am just not aware that the question has been changed. I have to re-direct it to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, but I want to thank him for the feedback or response. I am aware of the big task there to get this fixed and done and I want to thank him that he is talking about the consultations and all other talks that you need to go through in order to address this problem. Something that I want to say, yes, I am the author of the question. It was nothing really political when I thought about bringing the question to the House. I know it is a big problem out there. I have seen lives being destroyed because of this pornography so when I put the question across to the team to the party if we can this ask this question in Parliament because it was all about saving our children.

Update on Changes to Bus Fare Programme
(Question No. 173/2023)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection update Parliament on the changes to the Bus Fare Programme as announced in the 2023-2024 Budget?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. This question has come about as a result of inquiries that have been made by the public as well as

our Members and Members of the Opposition. I was particularly asked by honourable Naivalurua on this issue of the bus fare and the policy of Government but let me explain a bit about the Programme.

The Bus Fare Programme, as you know, is one of the many programmes targetted to addressing the needs of our vulnerable population. It is meant to help our beneficiaries of over 60 years old and our people living with disabilities.

In order to qualify, Mr. Speaker, Sir, first you provide your birth certificate, as well as a letter from the disability organisation to support the fact that you are living with a disability and there is an application form. The colour-coded bus fare identification card, it is red for persons living with disability and yellow for elderly persons.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bus fare programme which started in 2011 with about 22,000 beneficiaries, we now currently have 42,000 beneficiaries in August, 2023. The initial monthly top up ranges from \$40 at the commencement and then later was decreased to \$20 and then a further reduction to \$10 during COVID-19. Then it was later restored to \$25 a month.

The 2022-2023 Budget, \$75 for every three months, it was implemented. In this financial year, the bus fare programme needed to be amended in terms of the top up and I will explain why. We first changed it to \$25 a month because we found out recipients by giving them \$75 for three months, there were recipients who were running out of that and were not budgeting for the three months so that it lasted them for three months. They would run out quickly, so \$25 a month was implemented.

The other change, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I believe is what we have been asked about as a government is that we have found over 50 percent of our active beneficiaries (over 24,000) have been accumulating balances in their e-transport cards, so they have been accumulating these balances. It would range \$25 to \$300, so the Government has been topping up cards of our recipients and over 50 percent, Mr. Speaker, Sir, do not use it or do not utilise it. There was a big budget from the Ministry that was going to this.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we came into Government by the last quarter, we had a \$12 million shortfall in terms of our welfare assistance because this was being paid to users accounts and they were not being utilised. We had to review that, Sir, and look at a better way of doing this which had been done by the previous Government but was changed recently.

What has happened in this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that it is reverted to the \$25 a month but based on utilisation. The top up is on what you actually use to get back to \$25. Yes, we have those that utilised this full amount and have been affected and they have come to address it with us but the fact that we have over 50 percent we have not utilised and have got balances even up to \$300 and there is room for abuse in terms of other members of the family using the card, Sir. The bus drivers do not necessarily distinguish or ascertain if you are over 60 when you are using the card. They just take the money, that is income. They let them swipe, it is being used by others who are not entitled to this particular benefit.

The method of this top-up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is sustainable and it ensures that the funds provided to improve accessibility are efficiently use. There is always room for improvement. We get the feedback from our people living with disabilities that the buses are not disability-friendly, they cannot use it. We are doing a review of that programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and discussing with the Ministry of Finance whether we need to convert this particular utilisation thing into cash. Just like we have done the Food Vouchers into cash in this current year, we are looking at whether we should do this top-up to cash instead of it being put into their cards and using their cards.

Our elderly do find it difficult to take the bus at times, our people living in rural and remote areas do not have bus services so they want to see how we can help them that they can have access to carrier services and minibuses and this is part of the review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to consider converting this particular allowance into cash something that we could consider in the next financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you also heard that there is a possible review of the eTransport card system and so if it is converted into cash and perhaps, they can still use it on the bus or use cash on the bus or have it provided also for other forms of transport and not just the public buses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is always room for improvement, but I hope this is clear to the public - the need for the reconsideration of the policy to keep topping up \$25 every month regardless of utilisation and the need to look at a more efficient way of assisting our people and that is to replace only what is utilised. I hope that is clear Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is the response to the question. Thank you.

HON. T.N. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, are there provisions for special case that have special needs? People might be travelling up and down because they need to do it, for example, going to hospitals and that will be more than \$25, \$25 it would take someone travelling from Sigatoka to Suva that is one way. In those kind of situations, how do we deal with that? Are you planning to give some flexibility on that? Some allowance? Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a difficult one to consider in terms of case by case basis if those who are frequently using for those purposes, but I do note that there is a general increase in the social welfare allowance for our elderly and for our people who live with disabilities all around in the current budget year. So, we hope that that will assist them, but we need to keep it consistent because of the need to be able to meet the budgetary needs of the bus fare assistance, but hopefully, we can consider an increase year after year as we go on, depending on the budgetary allowances from the Government.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand that the Government is in the process of changing the e-ticketing system, and of course it is linked to the bus fare programme and the changes to increase efficiency and transparency. How is that change going to solve some of the current challenges the bus fare programme has faced?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not in the position to answer what the review contains, that is in another Ministry, I think Ministry for Transport, but we certainly will work together in terms of ensuring that they are consistent.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is related to this change that took place where previously \$75 was given for three months, and now it is \$25 a month. The question is, as asked by the honourable Member, when he mentioned that there are people who want to travel from Western side to come to MIOT Hospital or wherever if they need some assistance. When \$75 were given for three months, they were able to adjust the expenses and they were able to utilise that. There was no issue whatsoever, but now, with this monthly payment of \$25, can the honourable Minister explain whether the cost of dishing out this \$25 has also increased every month? Previously, when you give \$75 out for three months, that was one time cost that means four times it was being processed, and now, it is processed every month, so what is the difference in the cost?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as far as the administrative task of putting it in every month according to Vodafone, it does not cost them. They are just basically assisting us to deposit it every month into the cards but because we made the appeal that we actually had a number

of recipients who ran out of their balances before the end of the three months, that they were not able to manage, the \$25 a month helped them to be able to budget it. We have been able to work that out with Vodafone and all the providers that they could top up every month.

Establishment of Roadside Stalls
(Question No. 174/2023)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on the Government's plans to assist farmers in the rural communities by establishing roadside stalls to help them sell their farm produce?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, basically, the Government will continue the programme of installation of roadside stalls. It is a very good programme that was introduced by the previous government. We believe that it has contributed greatly to economic activity amongst the rural communities as well as farms. The stalls in Navua are classic examples of how well-presented stalls can actually attract a lot of businesses and we are keen to actually continue the support.

One other thing, perhaps when I saw the question, we probably will look at doing is the connection between the farmers and where the stalls are actually being installed and how we can overlay that with the other additional MSME assistance that we have available for all farmers around Fiji. That is just something we will also endeavour to do as part of supporting the farmers.

Of course, the support stimulates economic activity and creates economic opportunity for the rural farmers. To date we have 103 stalls already installed, which is quite significant and they are in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu as well. We are working very closely with the *turaga ni koro*, of course, there is wear and tear on these stalls and we are trying to work with the *turaga ni koro* or community leaders to ensure that the stalls are well kept. Some of the stalls have been there for some time and need improvement or replacement.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also looking at exploring Public-Private Partnerships to try and encourage the building of more stalls that can help assist farmers. If there are any specific requests that the honourable Tuicolo may have in mind, I invite him to contact the Ministry and we are happy to look at the request and that applies to all of us in the august Chamber. We are happy to have a look. The budget was not that large this year and that is why we are looking at Public-Private Partnerships but going forward, we will continue to work on what I believe is quite a very good initiative in terms of trying to support rural farmers.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many such good initiatives by the FijiFirst Government, honourable Minister, this is just one of it. Instead of just microwaving and presenting, if you can tell us how many new stalls were made this year? Also, a caution, for this particular programme, it is not about people bringing requests to the Ministry or to you, there is a transparency involved where it is advertised, and people apply for it. There is a strict criterion which one has to follow, just for your information.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment like I said, there is a programme of repairs being done to stalls and also we are looking at requests. There are currently requests from several places, Serua, and other locations that are being looked at.

One of the things that intrigued me about the cost of the stalls is they appear quite high, so I have asked that to be reviewed as well. At the moment, one stall is costing between \$25,000 to \$30,000. Similar to the road situation, we might just need to have another look at that. I do accept that it has to be kept Category 5 designed which is probably the reason, but we will just look at that as well just to make sure, even thinking that maybe perhaps we can get the communities to get involved ...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, answer the question.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- As I have said, we are repairing some of the stalls and then we are also looking at where to deploy other stalls.

Volunteer Service Abroad of New Zealand
(Question No. 175/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations update Parliament on the Agreement between the Ministry and the Volunteer Service Abroad of New Zealand?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide an update on the Agreement between the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and the Volunteer Service Abroad of New Zealand and I thank the honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by way of background, the Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) is New Zealand's largest and most experienced volunteer agency, working on international development, similar to the Australian Volunteer International (AVI) and USA Volunteer (USA Peace Corp).

Sir, VSA is a New Zealand registered charity agency that is non-religious, non-political and a non-governmental organisation. Operating since 1962, VSA is New Zealand's facilitator of the National Volunteering Development Programme funded under the New Zealand Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade as part of the Aotearoa New Zealand Aid Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, VSA brings people together from New Zealand and the wider Pacific to share skills and experience, working to transform lives and create a fair future for all. Sir, VSA operates under five broad thematic areas, and they are:

- (1) business and economic growth;
- (2) health and well-being;
- (3) education;
- (4) environment and climate change; and
- (5) agriculture, fisheries and food security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pacific Island countries and organisations that are currently partners with VSA are Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Tonga, PNG, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Bougainville and the United Nations and council of regional organisations of the Pacific agencies operating in Fiji.

Through VSA volunteers and partnerships, it has helped many Pacific developing countries address their development needs across many sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries, health, climate change, disaster risk reduction and good governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a wide consultation with key stakeholders and line ministries including the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was conducted before a proposal was submitted to Cabinet for approval. For the record, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Agreement has now been approved by Cabinet for implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the final signing of the agreement between the Ministry and VSA, New Zealand is yet to be done. The signing formalities and the date is being arranged by the VSA officials of New Zealand and the New Zealand High Commission in Suva has planned for Wednesday, 29th November, 2023.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. At the outset, I want to inform Parliament that the honourable Minister has handed in the report that was promised by him so I want to thank him.

MR. SPEAKER.- Provided it to you after lunch, honourable Member?

HON. P.K. BALA.- A bit later in the evening, Sir, but I got it at the end of the day.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is still after lunch?

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament how many volunteers have been engaged from January to-date under our current volunteer scheme programme?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, that is a new question, I will get the answer for him later on.

MR. SPEAKER.- You showing some very interesting signs, honourable Premila Kumar. The floor is yours.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to be corrected here, but I am under the impression that the VSA programme has already been running in Fiji and it is not a new one. Under the VSA programme, we had an officer from New Zealand working on the Housing Policy at the Ministry of Housing, so I need clarification on that.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are in the process of signing a new Agreement.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity. It is on the idea of volunteers and I thank the honourable Minister for this new signing which we look forward to a lot of benefits. There was a programme that we used to have where people who had retired from Fiji, we work with the countries like New Zealand to get them to become volunteers in other countries that they were paid. I know you will tell me that this is a new question, but is this something you are still pursuing?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I think it is very similar, thank you.

Policies on Bus Service
(Question No. 176/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on policies that are in place when bus companies stop service delivery to the public for any particular route?

MR. SPEAKER.- You walk, honourable Member. I am just joking.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. Sir, first and foremost all road users, all vehicle owners, passengers and permit holders for Public Service Vehicles are governed by the Land Transport Act 1998 and its corresponding Land Transport Regulations 2000.

Section 65 of the Act mandates that permit holders must adhere to their permit conditions. Bus companies are provided with permits called “Road Route Licence”, which authorises the transport of passengers and goods in three categories:

- (1) State service which is scheduled service along a specified route between terminating points with stops intended to meet the needs of persons along or in the vicinity of the route.
- (2) Express service which is scheduled service between terminating points with or without a limited number of stops at hotels or towns, intended to meet the general needs of the public.
- (3) Shuttle service which is services within a suburb to meet the needs of passengers on a regular basis.

Upon issued with such permits, bus companies are mandated under the Act to provide the necessary services. The services are provided as approved timetable or schedules under the road route licence. Failing to follow the approved timetable containing the routes and scheduled times, the bus company can be penalised under the Act for not complying to its permit conditions. The onus is on the bus company to inform the LTA if it is unable to provide the services to a particular route so that the LTA may seek alternative service providers to provide such necessary services.

If the bus company does not notify the LTA and continues breaching its permit conditions by not providing the services stipulated under the Act and the road route licence, then the LTA must be notified of these lack of services. The LTA will then invoke Regulation 12, these are proceedings under the Land Transport Public Service Vehicle Regulations 2000 where the bus company must show cause to the LTA as to why LTA should not vary, suspend or cancel the road route licence due to its lack of services. This year the LTA has invoked the proceedings on two road route licence operators and two minibus operators due to breaches in the permit conditions.

The Authority has also implemented policies and guidelines derived from the Act to ensure public transport is maintained or enhanced and this includes the revised guideline and quality assurance maintenance system which allows LTA management and board to carry out, follow internal processes, allow for sharing of routes with other operators and approval is given by Chief Executive Officer if temporary arrangement is for one month. If temporary arrangement is more than one month to cover that area, the LTA can consider further actions and, of course, the Public Service

Vehicle show cause policy. Again, this is derived from Regulation 12, if a condition subject to which the permit was granted has not been complied, the Authority is satisfied that the breach is serious frequent and causes inconvenience or danger to the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Authority has suspended or cancelled a permit, the LTA also implements internal measures to ensure the public transport services are not affected. An immediate action that LTA can take and has set as precedence for the PSV Tribunal is that the closest bus operator to the affected area may provide temporary services whilst the Land Transport Authority takes more formal processes such as calling for expressions of interest.

The Land Transport Authority has invoked certain policies in certain cases in the West where the bus operator was not able to provide the necessary services due to financial constraints, and some of the immediate actions on this in the interior of Nadi enabled other providers such as minibuses to cover that area on a temporary basis.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, I think you have explained very well all the provisions and the laws involved to deal with those operators who fail to provide the service. You mentioned something about the moving of Regulation 12 to cancel or suspend permits. But the problem is still there where lots of complaints from the public about services which is still the failure of most operators to provide the service. There is a lot of that coming.

I know Baulevu, there is a lot of theft coming from Nadi and the *colo* of Nadi. I think it may be to do with the lack of response or slow response to deal with those issues. Will the Ministry be able to look into that and get some kind of database to collect these kinds of complaints coming because it is really getting bad? We are receiving complaints from people telling and begging us to do something. We promised them that we will take it up to the Minister if they can solve this problem. I know the show cause is there but the process is a bit longer. By that time most of our people are being affected and continues to be a problem with the travelling public.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Coalition Government, we had established that the Land Transport Authority has been under-funded under the FijiFirst Government. In collaboration with the honourable Minister of Finance, we have increased the budget and there was a continuous issue about human resources shortages within the LTA, including poor monitoring and enforcement.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Operational?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- With an increased budget, we are engaging in more recruitments for the monitoring part which has been a serious problem and that will partially address that. We are looking at other measures too but that was one of the main problems and we are working on that.

The other one is catching up on the LTA facilities around the country, we are looking at upgrading the North. So, with those upgraded facilities, with up-to-date equipment and human resources, you will not have the situation where the FijiFirst Government went to do a commissioning and planted a coconut tree. That coconut tree is now matured without the office which was supposed to be built.

(Laughter)

The Coalition is now bearing fruit by building that office which was commissioned but not built.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, question to the honourable Minister: the service providers want to continue with the licences that they have been provided with, but one of the big factors here is the condition of the roads. Honourable Minister, travel to Korovou one of these days from Kasavu, you pass Logani down to Nadaro, you have been sleeping on the job. Come away from the politics and fix the roads. What are you going to do with the road conditions because that is what the service providers are waiting for. They want to continue with the service, it affects the people but Government has to fix the roads. What are you doing with the current road conditions?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition, we are always going back to the roads. That is always a valid concern, but I would like to reiterate again the situation we faced when we came in regarding Fiji Roads Authority whereby December, the FijiFirst had already expended everything. There was nothing.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Admit! *Paisa nai he.*

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is more than one year.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- An analysis of the accounts revealed that even the retention funds normally kept for refund to the contractors was used from the bank and there were no emergency funds put aside for roads by the FijiFirst Government, so these are the complexities we face.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Not only that, as I had mentioned, the removal of Public Works Department (PWD), the depots and all that, but now we are building that up. It takes a while to build it up, we do not just come in and immediately everything is there. We reform and rebuild.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Oh, he was the Infrastructure Minister here, but the honourable Minister will understand the process that rebuilding takes time.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Now, you understand the process.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- After one budget everything should be in place and the next budget, everything should be 100 percent but on the roads, we are working.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- You might not be there in the next budget.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, definitely that is in the programme and we are working on it.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Fix the road, otherwise, you will come this side.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We are working on Vuci Road. There is a road just past Nausori Airport in front of Nasilai Village, it has been like that for 30 years and now we are fixing it, so we are gradually moving towards that even though it might look slow to you.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Very slow.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- 15 years.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- But it is not slow, slow but sure, so let us have patience,

please.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really admire how the honourable Minister is so confidently incorrect at most times. The question has spoken about policies and laws but in this 11th month, a lot of communities are complaining that the service delivery by the bus companies are not provided.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the honourable Minister that when people are not able to move, the economy is not able to move, education, employment and everything is affected so what magnitude of impact does this have on our economy?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, honourable Member. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is hard to analyse the magnitude of the impact of non-delivery of services that sounds like a master thesis which honourable Ketan Lal was supposed to do.

(Laughter)

Issuance of Business Licences in Municipalities
(Question No. 177/2023)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on whether the Town and City Councils will be given the authority to process and issue Business Licences under their Municipality?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the question before Parliament this afternoon, I would like to pay my tribute and express my heartfelt condolences to the *Vanua o Nabukebuke*, Solevu Bua, *Vanua o Nabukebuke* Namosi on the passing on of the *Radini Vanua o Nabukebuke*, Namosi. Our prayers and thoughts are with the *Vanua* and *Turaga Vunivalu na Tui* Namosi in his time of sorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my response to this question is based on economics of business licence management. The focus is on the efficiency and the effectiveness of business licence management. The relocation of Business Licence Act 2020 was a move to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and improve ease of doing business in Fiji. However, it is regrettable that the execution of this decision has some shortfalls of some deficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to contextualise the issue of doing business, our business licencing 2019 World Bank doing business Report states that small or medium size businesses in Fiji require an average of 40 days, remarkably 28 percent to 30 percent of this time which is equivalent to 11 days was consumed by the business licencing process. An overall cost incurred by individuals to initiate such businesses in Fiji amount to \$1,600 with business licence fees ranging from \$100 to \$500.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issuance of a business licence was contingent upon obtaining approvals from various regulatory agencies including Occupational Health and Safety with the Ministry of Labour, the National Fire Authority and the Ministry of Health. In principle a Council was tasked to ensuring that all necessary approvals were granted before issuing the business licence. However, concerning practice emerge Councils through bylaws introduced business licences requirements for the same type of business across different jurisdictions. This meant that a business aiming to operate a multiple town sets to navigate varying sets of requirements and fees for the business licence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in practical terms Councils took an unreasonable amount of time ranging from one to three months and in some extreme cases over a year to issue business licences. The situation underwent a significant shift in 2020 when the Business Licence Act was revoked, subsequently World Bank conducted a survey to gauge the impact of business in terms of savings.

The 2022 findings revealed that the removal of the business licence requirement led to substantial savings in compliance cost, amounting to almost \$3 million in a single year. So, this information underscores the significance of streamlining the business licensing process, as it not only reduces bureaucratic hurdles, but also contributes to the substantial financial relief for businesses operating in Fiji.

The perennial issue plaguing our councils and licensing agencies is not the absence of business licence, but the lack of enforcement. This problem has worsened over the years. Mr. Speaker, Sir, countries such as New Zealand, Georgia and Singapore are models for not requiring business licence, but we cannot overlook the robust regulatory frameworks and efficient enforced mechanisms these countries have in place. It takes an average of one and a half day to start a business in these nations, because they have streamlined processes and stringent enforcement, and not because they have eliminated the need for licences.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, revoking the Business Licencing Act should have been accompanied by a comprehensive strategy to enhance coordination amongst councils, licensing agencies, and Registrar of Companies and Fiji Revenue and Customs Services. Transparency between these agencies is surely lacking, hindering informed decision making by councils and perpetuating a lack of accountability.

The solution is ensuring seamless information flow, data sharing between agencies and accountability. Transparency and coordination must be more than a buzz word it should be the pillars of effective governance. Councils need the tools to monitor business activities within their jurisdiction and act swiftly when violations occur.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to making it easier for businesses to operate in Fiji, the focus would be on strengthening and enforcing enforcement agencies, such as, the Ministry of Labour, National Fire Authority, Ministry of Health and the Liquor Licencing Board. Legislative reviews should empower these agencies with the authority to conduct spot checks and impose substantial penalties, shifting the burden on compliance rightfully onto business operations. In our relentless pursuit of effective governance, the Ministry is actively engaged in collaborative initiatives with councils, aiming to enhance coordination with licencing agencies.

Pivotal strategies in this endeavour is the establishment of the MOU between the councils and key entities, such as Registrar of Companies and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services. This strategic partnership will facilitate the exchange of tailored information providing councils with a comprehensive overview of registered businesses within their jurisdiction, including details on the nature of their operations. Through this MOU, the FRCS will furnish essential data regarding the operational status of these businesses. Concurrently, the work towards the formation of Divisional Coordination Committee is testament to our commitment to transparently share information on approved business operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, empowered by this well government information, councils will be able to proactively notify relevant agencies in the event of potential breaches. This heightened vigilance will be further re-enforced by councils making readily available agencies the scheme plan for municipal boundaries. This plan meticulously identifies the permissible types of business activities within the specific areas, ensuring a clear and enforceable framework. I reiterate, our unwavering

commitment to fostering an environment where doing business in Fiji is not only streamlined, but also very cost effective. Elections are testament to this dedication as we diligently rectify past mistakes, simultaneously, as we are steadfast in our resolve to safeguard against any potential violation of laws, reinforcing the relationship between business facilitation and regulatory compliance.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this collaborative measures underscored education to creating a business landscape in Fiji that is both conducive to growth and in adherence to legal frameworks and I thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir to respond to the question in this august House this afternoon.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to say that when the honourable Minister was speaking on this subject, it reminded me of 2019 and 2020 where the staff of the Ministry of Industry and Trade worked extremely hard to bring about this reform in the business licensing. So, all that was done, and it is good to hear that it is continuing so this is another initiative of our government the FijiFirst Government but we thank you for continuing with it as we say microwaving, so it is continuing.

But, my question to you is, there was a problem with the explosion of informal businesses that were operating informally from residential houses and the issue was mainly related to the registration of businesses/business registry and the problem was that they just gave an address and sometimes the address is residential address and they think that because the companies office have registered it under a residential address so I can operate from here and that was something that the Ministry of Local Government was trying to deal with it. So, if you can tell us whether any work has been done in that area because that is very critical.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you, honourable Member, for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my response this afternoon, I was just emphasising on the economics of business management. It does not mean that it will continue with its process because there are some issues that have been raised by some of the councils that I had visited on the possibility of reverting to the old process. It is something that we are also reviewing at the moment, and there is no guarantee that we will continue with the process and that is something that we are going to do.

As we bring about changes, we need to look at all the stakeholders that are involved, one of the issues that some of these councils have forfeited is the fees from issuing business licenses and there are some other benefits that the councils went to do that actually centralised or even regulate their reducing of business licence. So, that is something that we are also going to consider and review.

Perhaps, on the issue of having difficulties with the registration of businesses, especially by those who live and do not have access to the internet and also for those who live in the outskirts of towns and cities, that is something that the Ministry of Trade and Commerce is working on right now with our Ministry - an online platform that would be able to include all the stakeholders that are involved in the registration of business because once we digitalise our process, we will be able to get all the information on one platform that we will be able to share and gather information that are relevant and also necessary for those that are going to apply or those that are going to register online.

MR. SPEAKER.- The question by honourable Sachida Nand has been made redundant in view of the statement made by the honourable Minister for Agriculture. We will jump right to the eighth Oral Question for today.

(Question No. 178/2023 was withdrawn)

Labour Reforms Consistent with Labour Laws
(Question No. 179/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations update Parliament on Labour Reforms consistent with the ideals and principles of the labour laws as required and set out by the International Labour Organization?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I rise to respond to the question and I thank the honourable Member for asking. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the subject of labour reforms is quite substantial, and I intend to dwell on this topic in-depth when I present a Ministerial Statement in the next sitting. However, for this response I am, therefore, going to be brief.

Sir, Fiji has ratified 39 Conventions and one protocol of which nine are Fundamental Conventions, four Governance Conventions and 26 Technical Conventions. The Fiji Government had incorporated the social justice principles of the 39 ILO Conventions and we have ratified into our labour laws. These Conventions include nine out of ten ILO Core Conventions and the ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Protocol to the Occupational Health and Safety Convention and four Priority ILO Conventions of the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a fair globalisation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to take you back to 2006 when you and I were both in Parliament. You were a Minister; I was with the Sector Committee on Social Services and that is when the Employment Relations Bill came to Parliament. This Bill came to Parliament after seven to ten years of discussion amongst the ERAB Members as well as the Government and we had six laws that were consolidated to develop the ERA.

The Bill went through major consultations with all the stakeholders through the Employment Relations Advisory Board. The Bill was passed by Parliament unanimously. So, you and I both must get credit for that. You and I both are owed some pension.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Maybe, honourable Member.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, through this process, the six different components were put together in one document. While the Bill had been passed by Parliament, it could not go through Senate, so it became, instead of ERA, it was ERP 2007 when it was implemented.

The best part was that this law ensured that the rights of all the different stakeholders were equally respected and catered for. It was acclaimed as a law that was in line or in compliance with the standard principles requiring the minimum standard to be met by the ILO Conventions that we had ratified.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thereafter, the unilateral amendment that came through the interim regime, the onslaught on the workers' rights by way of a Decree after Decree and then in 2015 the elected government further exacerbated it by passing some laws and extending the Essential National Industries (ENI), at least that we are going to discuss tomorrow; the workers lost out totally. There was nothing left for them in terms of seeking justice. We are all aware of the kind of harassment that union leaders went through. Yours truly is one of them by the way.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Shame, very poor!

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, then the Fiji Trades Union Congress had no option but to seek assistance from the ILO. Somehow, honourable Usamate seems to have a very blurred idea about ILO.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- He says, we are following, we are doing things because we are being told, we are following those Conventions that we are signatory to. We made a commitment and after that we made sure that as per the requirement, those laws are enshrined in our labour laws. That is how Conventions work. When you are a member of an international organisation like the ILO where there are 187 countries, there are those countries that he had alluded to who may not have signed, but they are the best of thriving democracies where everyone's rights is fully respected.

(Hon. J. Usamate interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.D. SINGH.- They are fully observing the rights of the people. We are amongst those countries who signed, and we come back and then we breach. There is no point in signing when you do not want to follow it. The bottom line is that we were depriving our own people of their fundamental rights.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- And they are fully responsible for that. They are 100 percent responsible!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2016 when the Direct Contact Mission which is a very high-powered mission, was going to come to Fiji, the former Attorney-General himself scurried to Geneva...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- ...brokered a deal, signed an agreement and witnessed by the then Director General of ILO – a big photo in the dailies with the tripartite partners and he is standing there, came back to Fiji and forgot about it.

(Laughter)

There were a few changes made here and there.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Very good , very good.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I know, deep in their hearts, all those three Labour Ministers who were there, they sympathised.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Their conscience will prick them all their lives because they were saving

their jobs instead of looking after the interest of the workers as the custodians of the rights of the workers (the Ministers).

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- *Areh!* You talk too much, *reh?*

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Listen!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are only undoing what they did, correcting and going back to what existed prior to 2007 where people enjoyed their full rights.

HON. K.K. LAL.- High cost of living.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we go through the full labour law amendments, we will go through all the amendments that they made to deprive us of our rights as workers and restore that. We also are signatories to the SDGs - SDG8, which fosters decent work and sustainable economic growth, where workers' rights must be respected.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- \$5 an hour.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me answer that one too.

(Laughter)

We are now in the process, ERAB is going to sit after this, we are going to get the 10 Wages Councils that they had disbanded and are coming back and the minimum wage is going to be determined through the ERAB. We are working closely with the Ministry of Finance to complete that exercise. We will complete that exercise. First the minimum wage, then the minimum wages for the 10 Wages Councils which they had disbanded, we are putting back.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said earlier, their conscience will prick them all their lives. There will be more tomorrow, Sir.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- We have had a lengthy one on that one.

Written Questions

PSV Driver Licences and TIN
(Question No.180/2023)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the following –

- (a) How many Traffic Infringement Notices were issued within the last 10 months to PSV related offences; and
- (b) How many PSV Driver licences were placed on warning, final warning, suspended or cancelled because of being habitual offenders within the last 10 months?

¹ HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU. I thank the honourable Member for the question. I hereby table my written response.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.— Thank you very much, honourable Minister, for the quick response.

Construction of Farm Roads
(Question No. 181/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the following –

- (a) how many farm roads were constructed and completed in the past eight years, that is, 2014 to 2022 by Province; and
- (b) how many farm roads are earmarked to be constructed in the current financial year by Province?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.— Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the ²question. I hereby provide the written answer.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

FPF Data on Reports of Sacrilege – 2007-2022
(Question No.182/2023)

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 reports received by the Fiji Police on alleged acts of sacrilege and the breakdown of the same by year and division for the period 2007 to 2022;
- (b) the number of persons who were charged for committing the alleged acts of sacrilege and presented to any Court of law in the period 2007 to 2022 and the breakdown of the same by year and Division;
- (c) the number of charged persons who were successfully convicted and sentenced for committing acts of sacrilege in the period 2007 to 2022 and the breakdown of the same by year and Division;
- (d) the total number of cases still pending before the Judiciary pertaining to persons charged with committing alleged acts of sacrilege in the period 2007 to 2022; and
- (e) the total number of suspects and reports still under investigation pertaining to alleged acts of sacrilege in the period 2007 to 2022 and the breakdown of the same by year and Division?

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 180/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 181/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways is appended as Annexure II.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.— Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for her question. I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER. — Before we move on to the next item on the Order Paper, for housekeeping purposes, I am bringing to our attention for approval before we continue with the order for the day, the suspension motion. So, with the purposes of complying with Standing Orders and with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move the suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have Schedule 2 – Motions for Debate, as you can see in the Agenda, to cover which is why we are asking for the motion in front of us.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments to add.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

OVERSEAS TRAVELLING ALLOWANCES – MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I offer the floor to the honourable Prime Minister for his motion, in light of queries that have been raised with Parliament, I wish to provide some clarity on the Emoluments Committee process and as well as the motion that will be moved by the honourable Prime Minister.

Before we proceed to that and pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 11th September, 2023, the Emoluments Committee is still undertaking its assignment and will continue in existence until it completes its assignment as resolved by Parliament. As I had alluded to on Monday, 20th November, 2023, the Emoluments Committee through the Chairperson, had informed the Committee that it would table its report at a later sitting in line with the resolution of 11th September, 2023.

With respect to the motion that will be moved by the honourable Prime Minister, this was unanimously agreed to by the Business Committee. The motion as listed on the Order Paper has been moved pursuant to section 13 of the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014 and to provide further clarity, the honourable Prime Minister will move the motion to reduce the allowances given that under his ministerial assignments. Parliament business and the Parliamentary Remunerations Act of 2014 fall under his portfolio.

For the information of honourable Members, sections 3, 9, 12 and 13 of the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014 provide the means for determining the remuneration, inclusive of salaries, allowances and benefits for His Excellency the President, Prime Minister, other Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and Members of Parliament.

The next motion by the honourable Prime Minister can be undertaken simultaneously and this is further emphasised in the honourable Minister's motion whereby the amendment to take effect from 1st December, 2023, until such time that the Emoluments Committee tables its report in Parliament and the subsequent debate and vote on the Committee's Report has to take place. I hope that clarifies the issue.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

- (a) That pursuant to section 13 of the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014, Parliament makes a determination to reduce the rates payable for Overseas Travelling Allowances of the following positions by amendments to Part B of the Schedule to the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014, as set out below –
 - (i) Prime Minister
“9. Overseas Travelling Allowance – UNDP subsistence allowance plus 100 percent.”
 - (ii) Cabinet Ministers
“8. Overseas Travelling Allowance - UNDP subsistence allowance plus 50 percent.”
 - (iii) Assistant Ministers
“8. Overseas Travelling Allowance - UNDP subsistence allowance plus 25 percent.”
 - (iv) Leader of the Opposition
“8. Overseas Travelling Allowance - UNDP subsistence allowance plus 50 percent.”
 - (v) Members of Parliament (including Deputy Speaker, Government/Opposition Whip and Leader of the Government in Parliament and excluding the Prime Minister, Ministers, Speaker and the Leader of Opposition)
“6. Overseas Travelling Allowance – UNDP subsistence allowance plus 25 percent;” and
- (b) That this amendment to the Determination to take effect from 1st December, 2023 until such time that the Emoluments Committee tables its report in Parliament and the subsequent debate and vote has taken place.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion by the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you had pointed out prior to the moving of this motion, this motion in my name in today's Order Paper is for the reduction of travel allowances for Members of Cabinet, Assistant Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Before I go into it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I add my words of congratulation to our sportsmen and sportswomen in the Solomons at this time and also our words of condolences to those that had represented Fiji, particularly the Late Sitiveni Moceidreke and the *Vanua o Vuda*. I have a granddaughter playing in the South Pacific Games and I sent out my greetings to them, having been the Captain of the Fiji Team at the Pacific Games and also at the Commonwealth Games. I believe they are enjoying themselves but working very hard to get back up the medal scale.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, salary and allowances in the public sector were somewhat distorted by the previous Government and it was our policy to review this for parity and relativity. Prior to the Promulgation of the Parliamentary Remuneration Act 2014, the salaries of the interim Cabinet Ministers stayed secret and paid through a private accounting firm, despite being the subject of audit query.

Soon after assuming office in December last year, I announced my intention for the reduction of exorbitant ministerial salaries and travel allowances. Unfortunately, that was not operationalised, because of some legal opinions that came to us, and probably to you too. Therefore, this motion is being tabled today to put in place the reductions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government as an employer, has a legal obligation to ensure its officials have sufficient funds to carry out their duties necessitated by travels. These are costs to the taxpayers and the host organisations that engage our Government Ministers and officials. However, the current rates are still exorbitant. It is the responsibility of this Parliament under the Parliamentary Remunerations Act of 2014, to ensure that Ministers and officials on duty travel stay in decent accommodation and are able to safely move from one point to the other to undertake their engagements.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the requirements arising from the nature of engagements may differ from official to official, depending upon their seniority and responsibility. These costs vary between countries and within countries. For instance, the cost in Canberra would be different from the costs in Brisbane. However, the current formula put in place by the past government for calculating these allowances are excessive. This motion seeks to correct that anomaly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the formula before this august Parliament today significantly reduces the daily allowance while remaining adequate for the officials concerned. The starting point for the calculation of the allowances in Fiji has been pegged at the UNDP Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) rates. The UNDP DSA rates are updated and published every quarter and are reliable. It is the standard used by almost all countries in calculating the travel allowances for Ministers and the officials. For Fiji and other countries, the extra loading for Members of Cabinet, Members of Parliament and Permanent Secretaries is to facilitate additional meetings that may be held. The extra loading also covers for representational events where these officials are hosting their counterparts. However, the formula for the increase made in 2016, despite the devastations of severe *TC Winston*, was excessive and sad to say, ill-advised.

In comparison to the previous administration led by late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the late Laisenia Qarase and the SVT Coalition of the 1990s, the 2016 increases were exorbitant. This motion is intended to rectify the anomaly in travel allowances brought about in 2016. Under the proposed formula, for example, the Prime Minister's DSA for Auckland, New Zealand is reduced from \$2,826 to \$1,590.

Similarly for the Ministers, the new formula will reduce their DSA for Auckland from \$2,090 to \$954. This is the same DSA for the honourable Leader of the Opposition. For Assistant Ministers, the allowance declined from \$1,572 to \$759. This is the same DSA for the Opposition Members of

Parliament. The new formula will apply to all destinations for consistency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the exorbitant salaries of Cabinet and in public sector are also areas of concern to taxpayers and we read about them in the social media everyday. It is also our policy to review and correct the severe distortion of salaries and allowances in the public sector and restore parity and relativity. It is, therefore, appropriate that if the Emoluments Committee of Parliament has been established and now carrying out its work with the assistance of an independent consultant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Parliament agrees these revised travel allowances will be effective from 1st December, 2023 until the Emoluments Committee completes its work and reports back to this august Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and before offering the floor, I have with me a list provided by the Whips:

- (1) Honourable Leader of the Opposition;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (3) Honourable J. Usamate; and
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to contribute in the debate on the motion before Parliament. Again, we want to say to the Government that you are the government, you call the shots. It is your prerogative as you regularly quote in your responses to most of the interviews that you have been having but we have a few questions:

- (1) What is the objective?
- (2) What are the reasons behind this?
- (3) Are they merely political or is it a question of availability of funds?
- (4) As the previous Opposition used to say, there is no money or where is the money?

It leaves us confused because on 12th July, we had already agreed and you had alluded to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that pursuant to Standing Order 129 that the Emoluments Committee be established to review the salaries and allowances. Again, on 1st August, the submission because they were not able to submit, and we understand that the work is still going on and we are represented in the Committee by the honourable Whip and honourable Mosese Bulitavu and are well aware of the discussions that are taking place in the Emoluments Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So where do we stand?

The question that we will ask is this, this is going to be effective from 1st December and when the work of the Emoluments Committee is completed next year and submitted and it is contrary to what we are going to agree on today, what will be our position because we have given the mandate to the Emoluments Committee and now, the honourable Prime Minister is coming up with a motion on the determination of allowances of the positions already highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Then the question of timing, why now, not earlier. Is this just to satisfy the honourable Minister of Finance who has been talking about this in the interviews that he has been having lately with Vijay Narayan? So is the Minister of Finance, again, like he did previously, forcing the honourable Prime Minister to come up with this motion? ‘

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Who is really in charge, Mr. Speaker, Sir - the honourable Prime Minister or the honourable Deputy Prime Minister?

(Laughter)

If I may use one of the favourite lines of the honourable Nawaikula as you are all aware, “Mr. Prime Minister, sack your Finance Minister.”

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has been telling Vijay Narayan in all the interviews that he is going to come up with a motion to reduce this, but why not earlier, why not in January, why not in the first hundred days? You have made full use of what was available, you have milked it dry and now you come into this House so that you can look good politically while the Report of the Emoluments Committee is still pending – you want to reduce this. It is illogical, it does not make sense.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us stand on principles. The former Leader of the Government in Parliament is behind you, she is in charge of the Emoluments Committee, and she is doing all her best in trying. The current Leader of the Government in Parliament is also in the Emoluments Committee, Mr Speaker, Sir. Do you have faith and trust in the work that they are doing, or shall we just disband the Emoluments Committee because they are ineffective and inefficient?

(Laughter)

Anyway, where do we stand? It is the question of timing as well, Mr Speaker Sir. I am well aware of section 13, that is, on the determination of a few of the positions but at the same time, Sir, particularly section 6, the principles to be applied when setting allowances and benefits. You have always talked about Parliamentary processes, listening and consulting that is the process but now you want to short circuit it again.

Section 6 of the Remunerations Act of Parliament 2014, when setting the remuneration to be prescribed the determination that it lays to allowances and benefits Parliament must also have regards to the following principles but the allowances and benefits shall be determined in a way that recognizes the need of the public understanding of the work of those persons and in the case of Members, their parties and the services they require to enable them to carried out their roles and functions.

Let me make it clear Mr Speaker, that we are not against this reduction. But as a matter of principles, we are arguing about the Committee that has been formed to look into this and they would have been a better position to go through the processes outlined the part 6 of the Act, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I’ve said you are the Government, you call the shots it is your prerogative, we are not against it because in terms of fairness as well it takes into consideration the need to be fair to the taxpayer. We are considerate of that, Mr Speaker, Sir. But, again, we have an Emoluments Committee, our decision, we will await the Emoluments Committee that we have already agreed to on 12th July, 2023.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Yes!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is a matter of principle because otherwise, again, this is a confused Government, this is a rudderless Government. Where do you stand? There is a lot of inconsistency in the things that you bring to the floor of Parliament.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Ministers are flip floppy.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- This is what I am trying to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if it is excessive ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Yes it is.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... the process is there and of course 17 as well allows for this to be reviewed. I will not go into it, honourable Deputy Prime Minister

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

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- You are one of the Ministers who benefited a lot. You had been globetrotting in the last few months, that is why you cannot fix these stalls on the roadside because you spent too much time overseas, not here in Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Yes!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- You have milked the system dry and then you want to come to Parliament and want to reduce it.

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

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Logic. Again, he is the Prime Minister of Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are aware of the UNDP allowance, we are aware of the subsistence allowance but there is a reason behind this incidental allowance. This is not only for the honourable Prime Minister, but also for everyone. Again, I have talked about us punching above our own weight, we need to be relevant in the global world, we need to be well represented, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Diplomacy, the art of diplomacy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not only the work of our diplomats, it is no longer the case now in this modern world. We, as Ministers we are an extension arm of diplomacy. There are issues that needs to be socialised. They do this well in the private sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because they have the funds. That is why they have all these functions, that is the art of diplomacy at work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last IPU meeting, Fiji has been given the chairmanship of Small Island States in IPU. We have to meet the honourable Speaker from the Seychelles and the Deputy Chair as well; I have forgotten the name of the country. It was meeting over lunch, we have to pay for it, that is why the incidentals are there.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is not everyday.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- \$200, \$300 for a Minister, a meal in New York, take five people, otherwise we are just

(Laughter)

Diplomacy, Sir. It is there for a reason. We all live in a benefit-oriented society but again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister talked about what was there previously but what came into effect in 2014, let me put it into perspective. While salaries and allowances were increased

although exorbitant as you may say, but we took away most of the other benefits as well; medical benefits, insurance benefits, housing benefits ...

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- That was a disaster.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... tax free whatever for a vehicle during a term. So, you are just given the salary ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You did not consult.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... and then you look after all your other expenses from the salary and allowances that you are given.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That was a disaster.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- So it was balancing of the expenses and the income that you are getting. That was the logic behind it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, we are not against it, but as a matter of principle, we await the work of the Emoluments Committee as we agreed to on the 12th July and when that report comes into this Parliament, we will then debate and make the right decisions accordingly, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is my contribution.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, sometimes I really feel for the other side of Parliament. I think if they look in the mirror, Sir, they will not like what they see.

HON. P.K. BALA.- But we feel for you.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The honourable Leader of the Opposition is a good orator, I have to give him that much. He is a great orator maybe because he is from the same province as I, but he was struggling today for fresh air and I will explain why.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been in the private sector for 30-plus years.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Disaster.

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I have never in my life seen the type of allowances that were paid to that side of Parliament; I have never seen it. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the private sector, the allowances of the UN are regarded the highest. So, we actually go below the United Nations allowance. We find out what the real cost is to the companies and then we will work out.

These allowances, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were absolutely excessive and it is funny now that we have actually been visiting, some of the things that the honourable Leader of the Opposition was saying about entertaining or whatever, most of the time when they go on these trips, they get entertained. They never spend any money anywhere. It very rarely happens. It is a nonsense to suggest that you are going around with 300 percent a day or 200 percent a day to actually go and entertain somewhere else. That probably happens only once or twice in that whole week or whatever when you are away.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the big reasons why we are so concerned on this side of Parliament was the excessive nature of these allowances. It is too much. In fact, I was not going to say it, but I am going to say it. They were making money on the allowance. That side of Parliament, Mr. Speaker,

Sir, were making money on of the allowances.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. BIA.- Enjoying it for the last 10 months.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- So, they sit here and claim about the allowances. The reality is that they were making money on the allowances. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just like to address the question about me making money on allowances. I will share this just so that everyone knows. As soon as I got into office, I reduced my allowance to 100 percent ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Grace Road.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ... out of principle, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just share that for him to know. Some of the other honourable Ministers did the same because we just felt that it was almost like thievery of the people of Fiji.

It is almost like stealing from the people of Fiji, that was how excessive it was. This load, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are a waste of taxpayer's money. That is one of the main reasons we are actually through with the honourable Prime Minister in deciding to reduce the allowances. I agree, it should have been done a long time ago which brings me to my second point.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as we got into office, we started talking about how to reduce these allowances. We ended up having a Cabinet decision in April, I believe. Sir, we formally decided on it and then we were told, "oh no, it has to go through the Emoluments Committee". And then we say, "okay".

Remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the first time in Government for a lot of us. We actually allowed the Emoluments Committee to operate and then we felt that we needed to do it because it just taking too long. It was absolutely taking too long. We made a decision in April and now we are going to wait for the Emoluments Committee until next year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we felt, maybe we are deviating from due process but who is benefitting? The people of Fiji are benefiting by us putting money back into the coffers for greater use for the bubbly good of Fiji. So, that is why we are doing it. We are not doing it because of any press release or because of honourable Biman Prasad. We are doing it because we had made a decision in April and we felt it was taking too long.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just thought that I clarify that so that that side of Parliament would know. When they look in the mirror, Sir, they will see what we are seeing.

The final point to make Mr. Speaker, Sir, is we had a promise that we had made to the people of Fiji about these allowances. If you look at the way we have been operating since we started, we are keeping up with our promises to the people of Fiji. The honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs just talked about the GCC coming back. The honourable Minister for Employment talked about the reforms that we are going to do in industrial relations that would put us back in a position where we really become a true democracy in our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third reason and the obvious one, we had made a promise to the people of Fiji like all the other things we are doing to deliver on that promise, we are delivering on that promise here today and besides, that side of Parliament was enjoying these allowances for eight years or 16 years ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- And you are just one year now.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ...because they were keeping it as a secret in terms of hiding the books from the people of Fiji. Maybe it was for 16 years. So:

- the allowances are excessive and need to go;
- we were just following process and the process was taking too long; and
- we are keeping our promises to the people of Fiji.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have not heard so much drivel and hogwash in such a long time. I think the honourable Prime Minister has spoken at length about why these allowances are in place in the first place. He has expressed his feelings; he thinks that it is too much. The honourable Leader of the Opposition has also spoken about why these things are put there in the first place.

When our Prime Minister and Ministers go out, they carry the status of their positions with them. They represent Fiji, they need to be able to demonstrate Fiji in good stand, they need to live in a nice place that has a good representation of Fiji. They must be able to do the kind of things diplomatically that we had talked about, not only in the meetings but outside of the meetings that allow them to get the results.

This morning when we heard the Ministerial Statement from the honourable Prime Minister, we saw the impact of good visits, where they make visits that bring good kinds of results. In order to do that, whenever Cabinet Ministers or Prime Minister goes, they need to carry themselves well because they reflect Fiji, and it is important that they represent Fiji well so that they can deliver good service for us.

As the honourable Leader of the Opposition says, a lot of the business that takes place, it takes place on the margins, not only in the meetings themselves. I hope that the people travelling to these meetings they actually go and say something, and they participate in all the side events and they try to create for themselves programmes where they go and meet people, have coffee, buy some lunch for someone to get some actual benefit out of it because that is where a lot of benefits come from. Benefits in the meeting but then there are things that you do outside and over and above that, the personal relationships that you create over time by meeting people, buying them coffee, buying them dinner, that is why all these allowances were there. I know some Ministers are probably just going to the meeting, they travel thousands of miles, they go there, they do not even make a statement, they do not go to any event, and they just come back, I hope that that is not happening. That is what it is meant for.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Do not lie.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is why all these things are important. That is what is reflected in the allowances that they make. As the honourable Leader of the Opposition had said, when all the benefits have been put into the salaries, that means a lot of the other benefits that were there for Ministers, Assistant Ministers and Members of Parliament were removed. It all became just the salary itself.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister said that they had to take this step because it was too slow. It is too slow because you were too slow. Everything that you do is too slow. Your processes are not right, that is why it is too slow. If it was so important, you could have done it in April. Everything was too slow because you are probably blind, still trying to find your way around, you do not know what to do. Probably, the people who are advising you are giving you the wrong legal

advice, whoever those people were.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- What we are seeing here is a Government that does not follow the due processes that we have here in Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Responsible Government.

HON. J. USAMATE- We have decided to have an Emoluments Committee and then you are shortcutting the Emoluments Committee. If you want to shortcut the Emoluments Committee, why not do the whole hog - do the whole salaries, do everything else, do not just look at the travel allowance, do it all because that is what you seem to be doing.

This is not new, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few years ago the Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Professor Prasad used to be the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. This is the purpose of the Public Accounts Committee, you look at all these reports then you make your findings and your submission and you present it to Parliament where it is discussed. But during that time, what he would as the Chairman, he would give off the cuff interviews to the press telling them what is actually happening when his focus as a Public Accounts Committee was to do the discussions and bring it to Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- He was trying to shortcut the processes of Parliament and that is what he is doing again now.

We have set up the Emoluments Committee to do this job and you are trying to shortcut it. The same thing that was done in the Public Accounts Committee, he is doing it again. Once we set up a process, we need to abide by it.

All the consultations have taken place in the Emoluments Committee. We have presented, I was part of the team from FijiFirst that presented there, other parties must have presented, we brought in a third party consultant. I think the report should be, if I am not mistaken, towards the end of this year. Hopefully the report should be ready, it should come out early next year. Why can we just not complete that particular process? As the honourable Leader of the Opposition said, I think what you are trying to do is trying to create a false political image of yourselves.

This is a political gimmick, that is all what this is. The process is just about to go, to finish and then you bring this in. There is absolutely no bases upon which to do this. We do not agree with what you are proposing here, we believe that we need to go through the Emoluments Committee, let them produce the report and complete the process as it should be done.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for afternoon tea and when we return, I will offer the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.38 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.17 p.m.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to fully endorse the motion tabled by the honourable Prime Minister and the Head of our Coalition Government. Let me also confirm that this motion is not only a knee jerk reaction to public concerns about travel expenditure, but as valid as the concerns that have been for almost 11 months, and were indeed so for more than six years since 29th September, 2016 up to 14th December, 2022 when the FijiFirst Government was in power.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can understand why the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Usamate would oppose this motion, and they camouflaged their Opposition to some kind of dubious argument about process.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely hogwash!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Very dubious argument about process. Let me remind them because some of them were part of that. When the Standing Committee on Public Accounts under my chairmanship, at that time the Opposition was chairing the Public Accounts Committee, came to a point where we demanded the secret salaries payment and the terms and conditions on which it was determined to be brought before the Public Accounts Committee, thereafter, I was sacked through an amendment to the Standing Order in this Parliament. All of them were sitting there supporting it.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Dictatorial.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talk about process. On 3rd October, 2014, three days before the new Parliament was supposed to sit, the Interim Government in which their leaders were part of brought a decree and determined for themselves for the Opposition the salaries and pays that they were getting after knowing that they had won the elections and were going to sit on the Government side.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What processes are they talking about?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- You are going against your own Prime Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is the hypocrisy.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hypocrisy that side.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You know that is coming from them. We know Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it has taken the People's Coalition Government nine months to bring this motion to the floor of this Parliament.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Degrading.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The honourable Prime Minister quite clearly explained why and despite that, despite the fact that all Members of Parliament Mr. Speaker, Sir, continued to endure a 20 percent salary cut, first imposed as a restorative measure from April 2020 by the former government and we know that our critics have generally demanded for a reduction in the overseas travel allowances.

We do not blame them Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are speaking out because we have given them

the full freedom to do so. We also do not blame them Mr. Speaker, Sir, for not talking about these things before because they were afraid, there was a fear of being victimised, harassed, intimidated by the former government. We have abundance of examples of that kind of victimisation, harassment and intimidation from 2014 to 2022.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Say it loud! Loud!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Because they are confused, they do not support the reduction because they were part of the loot of the increase in the allowances for that many years and they are actually confused. So, they are camouflaging and say 'Oh, this is a political thing.'

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you were not in Parliament and due to two years of unfair suspension from May 2015 when the overseas travel allowances skyrocketed because at that time an overwhelming majority of 50 Members of Parliament who occupied this august Chamber decided to vote for ridiculously high allowances on 29th September, 2016.

Neither was the honourable Prime Minister and indeed many other honourable Members on both sides of this Chambers as part of our Coalition Government only honourable Deputy Prime Minister Viliame Gavoka, honourable Aseri Radrodoro and I were back then sitting in the Opposition. The current Opposition which was back then the Government and in fact Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition when he was speaking, he actually ...

MR. SPEAKER.- Let me correct you, honourable Professor Biman Prasad, honourable Aseri Radrodoro never agreed.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am saying, he was with us in the Opposition, that was what I said.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What I am saying is that at that time, there were only three of us sitting on the Opposition who are in Government at the moment, that is what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Myself, the honourable Minister for Education and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, honourable Tikoduadua?

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am talking about 2016.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- 2016.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Obviously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have never seen the Opposition confused.

(Laughter)

HON. K.K. LAL.- *Areh*, only you're confused.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The current Opposition which was back then the Government and Mr. Speaker, Sir, they cannot even up to this point further the fact that they are sitting in the

Opposition. I think it will take them four years to learn the Opposition role and maybe another four years before they become the real Opposition. The then honourable Leader of the Opposition now Leader of the Opposition then Minister, honourable Faiyaz Koya, honourable Parveen Bala, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Mosese Bulitavu, honourable Semi Koroilavesau, honourable Alvick Maharaj and, of course, honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Why you say my name?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is worth recalling what honourable Jone Usamate said on the day in support of the recommendations of the Emoluments Committee and I quote:

“Ideally in an ideal world we would get an independent party to come but in this particular instance the Emoluments Committee has decided that it will not look at the remuneration but it must take into consideration those aspects of allowances that have an impact on the livelihood of how well the Parliamentarians themselves can carry out their roles”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what we are looking at today. This is what he said, and I quote:

“The Emoluments Committee and his suggestions is probably something people will not like it politically because it has an impact on how people reflect on Members of the House but it is something that needs to be done because it has an impact on the ability of Parliamentarians to fully engage themselves in the process to which they are called in this House.”

Mr. Speaker, the voting record of the day for the motion on a so-called Emoluments Report of four Members of Parliament will prove that there were two votes against the increase. And I can say very proudly honourable Prem Singh and I actually voted against the increases.

Our position back then now and now that we are in Government remains the same. It is unethical and worst of all Members of Parliament to determine our own salaries and that is why, Mr. Speaker, this Emoluments Committee that this Parliament has appointed is engaging independent experts to do that.

And you rightly, Mr. Speaker, have allowed the Committee more time to come with the Report done fairly, transparently and in accountable manner.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am sure we all agree that the means for achieving the end is also important.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to compare the new proposed rate of Overseas Travel Allowances and the honourable Prime Minister has done that but let me just repeat some of those. This is in respect of the honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers, Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament. Let us use the amount of US\$300 per day and a conversion rate of \$2.20 from US dollar to Fiji dollar.

Purely as an example of an UNDP rate which is the accepted standard for allowances. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will demonstrate that the reduction is not a cosmetic exercise but then the Peoples Coalition Government is more than walking its talk of reducing salaries and allowances by 25

percent. It is actually much more than this.

Under the current provisions of the Remunerations Act the Prime Minister will receive a daily overseas travel allowance of \$2,910 under the new reduced rate. The allowance will be \$1,320 per day. This is a big reduction, Mr. Speaker, of \$1,590. Even if you double the reduced allowance of \$1,320 it does not reach what would be paid under the current provision which is \$2,910 per day. Therefore, it is the reduction of not 25 percent but well over 100 percent and this is substantial. That is why the 250 percent loading on US dollars is being revoked and replaced with 100 percent. The \$600 a day as Incidental Allowance is being removed altogether.

In the case of Cabinet Ministers, Mr. Speaker, there is a similar scenario and again the reduction is more than 100 percent. The honourable Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, will get the same allowance as that of Ministers under the current provisions and as I said, it is the same as the Ministers. Assistant Ministers will receive the same allowance under the new provisions from 1st December. So Mr. Speaker, it is very important for us to understand that this process that we have adopted, and the honourable Prime Minister explained why this has taken this much time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister has been blamed for benefitting from exorbitant travel allowances, but it is only justified. You know if you look at the previous government's travel budget for the Prime Minister, the critics will have to understand. Let me just give you some statistics, Mr. Speaker.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Say it loud.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In the last eight years, they spent a total of \$74 million.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In domestic and overseas travel, this is travel cost of the previous Government. The honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, is ...

(Chorus interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No, I am just talking about the extent of the expenditure, and let me give them some facts. From 2014 to 2022, total domestic travel of \$50.4 million, for overseas travel from 2014 to 2022 - \$24 million.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the figures from the Ministry of Finance.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the figures from the Ministry of Finance.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker it is quite interesting that the honourable Leader of the Opposition become so confused because he was part of the decision in 2016 to increase the allowance in a way that it became so exorbitant.

It is again, Mr. Speaker, absolutely important for us to remind those people on the other side

that these are the very people who did not follow the process, who hid the information from the public and here is the Government, here is the Prime Minister who at the beginning of the term of the Government announced that we will be reducing the allowances and salaries. We have kept the 20 percent reduction on the salaries as well.

I am raising this Mr. Speaker because it is important for the people of this country to know, and the confusion that is coming from the Opposition. But tomorrow what they will do Mr. Speaker, Sir, when they go out, they will still go and talk about overseas trips.

Honourable Ketan Lal posted it on his *Facebook* page. He talks about the Prime Minister's travel allowance, he talks about the \$10,000 allowances. This is what they do but when they come here in Parliament they talk about the processes. The honourable Leader of the Opposition should actually look at what some of these Members of Parliament are writing and saying before he comes here in this Parliament and says

(Hon. K.K. Lal interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the hypocrisy that I am talking about from the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very timely motion by the honourable Prime Minister, and I hope the Opposition will change their mind and they will support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Discipline Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes. Honourable Ketan Lal, I heard you very clearly when you uttered the words "hopeless Government". I want to caution you, again, please those who are seating on this side have received the mandate from the people to be on this side and as well as on your side, so let us respect it. There is no such thing as a hopeless Government. I hope you will be mindful of that, honourable Lal.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the honourable Members for their contributions. I reiterate that the motion is for a reduction in the allowances and is based on section 13 of the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014. I read again section 13 and quote: "Parliament may issue separate determinations at different times for different positions."

Based on that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and based on an earlier attempt in accordance with our promise to reduce our salaries and allowances, we tried earlier but we were advised to go about it this way while the Remunerations Committee continues its work. That is why we have come up at this time, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Those of us that started at the very bottom scale of our careers know the difficulties that are currently faced by those that are at the bottom rung of their careers. So, when you come to this age and to these positions and realise that you are comfortable, perhaps, too comfortable. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this issue was raised in Cabinet when I came back from my first trip to Kiribati, and I realised that I did not use the allowances given to me. I said, "what are these allowances for, why do we get them if we are not going to be needing them?" So, I asked the staff in the office and we have been working at it and we have arrived at this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the Members for their contributions and because we are allowed to do that under section 13 of the Act, we brought it up this time and I am sure we will be voting, probably according to our party instructions, but, voting with a clear conscience that we are doing this, not only for ourselves but for the people who have a more difficult life than we are enjoying at this time. I commend the motion to the Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Just a point of clarification, again, honourable Members, on the mentioning of honourable Radrodro. There were a few of us in the Opposition then that did not agree to this rise in the allowances. That included me, honourable Radrodro, honourable Bulitavu and a few others.

After so many years, the honourable Prime Minister had to go between us and our fellow Members to try and get a better understanding of each other and a way forward for us Members of the SODELPA Party then. That, in a nutshell, is how it affected us. When we started receiving the allowance, after becoming Members of the Standing Committee, then we realised, it was a hefty increase - very, very big increase, and now we have this motion before us.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	28
Not Voted	-	5
Abstained	-	21

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY 2017–2018 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Defence and National Security 2017–2018 Annual Report which was tabled on 14th July, 2023.

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

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the review of the Ministry of Defence and National Security 2017-2018 Annual Report. It was reinstated from the last Parliament term, most of the work was done by the previous Standing Committee pm Foreign Affairs and Defence, we just carried on from there, hence this very short report. It has recommendations and the recommendation in the Report are made applicable to that reporting period.

I make this point to underscore the fact that a lot has been done by the Ministry up to when we were doing the reporting, even from when we tabled the report until today. As we had heard announcements made by the current Minister, a new ministry, now the Ministry for Home Affairs and Immigration, announcements that were made along the vein of some of the recommendations that we made.

The recommendations in this Report, again, is a five-year old Report:

- That priority be given to reviewing both the Police Act 1987 and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Act 1949 and I am sure the Minister can update us on that today.

The recommendations in this Report, again, it is a five-year old Report:

- That priority be given to reviewing both the Police Act 1987 and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Act 1949 and I am sure the Minister can update us on that today.
- That required resources both funding and training, be given to the development of the Incident Response Management Framework. This Framework is, according to the report developed by the Ministry is for our borders. It is to complement border security where their policies and plans to enhance contingency responses in the event of a security threat to Fiji's territorial borders. Hope that we will identify relevant agencies that are required to respond to any threat or security issue and also outline clear-cut lines of command, control and communication; easy for decision making and also for the effectiveness of the operation.

There are three documents that we mentioned in the report:

- (1) Search and Rescue Bill;
- (2) National Security Strategy; and
- (3) National Security Defence Council Bill

We are recommending that effort be made to make sure that these documents are completed, the Bill to be passed, again that was five years ago and maybe there is development around this. I know for the National Security Strategy, if the review began five years ago, it will be totally irrelevant now. So, I think it will have to be re-written so that it is line with the current security landscape, now and into the future.

It was reported that for this Ministry, there were 55 percent female and 45 percent male. In the reporting year, congratulations to the Ministry and the effort towards equal opportunity employment and gender, but we ask in the report that they not only give us numbers but perhaps outline the levels of posts that females are holding. Sir, that is an introduction to this report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to inform this august Parliament that I also received a list of speakers from their Whips:

- (1) Honourable A. Bia;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration
- (3) Honourable Leader of the Opposition; and
- (4) Honourable Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to make my contribution on the motion before Parliament. At this juncture, I would like to thank the Chairman and his Committee Members for a job well done in complying the Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I bring our attention to some of the key important findings and recommendations of the Report where we can raise questions as to what has been done to try and improve the services provided by the Ministry of Defence and National Security and which report is under review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the key issues highlighted in the report was the collaboration between the Ministry and various border agencies to work on upgrading and digitising Fiji's border systems in pursuit of a contact-less process with a seamless flow of passengers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this digitisation process is the way to go for our border agencies and at the same time improve service delivery and improve waiting time as well for Fijians and tourists who will cross our borders. The report under review is from 2017 to 2018 and we do know that work and discussions have progressed over the years to try and implement the digitisation process.

In February this year, a national consultation was organised to discuss the digitisation of the arrivals process at Fiji's borders, as well as the guiding principles needed to achieve its national border upgrade strategy. The consultation was to allow the Ministry to work with the UNDP Suva Office to align immigration processes to the Government's overall digital transformation strategy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure that the honourable Minister responsible is aware of the progress being made on this consultation report. This digitisation project at our borders will re-enforce our capacities, capabilities and systems for effective and efficient movement of travellers and cargo and strengthen links for data and knowledge sharing inter-agency and across regional cooperation. At the outset, as stated in the report and I quote, "this will greatly complement Fiji's border security policies and plans and also will enhance our contingency responses in the event of a security threat to Fiji's territorial borders". With that contribution, I once again thank the Committee and support the motion before Parliament.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament. First of all, let me thank the honourable Naupoto and his Committee for the Report that they have tabled in Parliament today. As he had rightfully said that this has been a report from sometime back - 2017 to 2018. As he has rightfully commented, a lot has changed since then, from the term of the last government and the continuation of what we are doing now. So, much of these recommendations today have been addressed in one form or another. I would like to maybe just concentrate on the recommendations that are here, and inform Parliament where things are, with regards to the five recommendations so to speak.

Very briefly I would say, before going to the recommendations and what they are proposing, a lot really hinges on the process of the national security and defence review, but as we all know was faced in Parliament by His Excellency the President when he opened this session of Parliament. That really is perhaps the overarching strategy, the process that will guide much of these changes that are presented here as part of the recommendations. We are going by that, and I will try just in the short time that I have just to cover it very briefly, and I know there is not enough time to do all that.

Nevertheless, suffice to say that the review of the RFMF Act as it is proposed is now before the Office of the Solicitor-General. There is liaison between the Office of the Solicitor-General, the Commander of the RFMF and the staff and the Ministry in addressing, particularly the new RFMF Act that has been proposed to Government by the RFMF; the current one which is the RFMF Act 1949. As for the Police, under the strategic review, looking at security in its entirety, I had spoken about Restore Blue as the process and that is the professionalisation of the Police Force. This is an intensive work on the Police Force and what they are and what we want them to be, the restoration of professionalism in the service. It is a lot of work Mr. Speaker.

At the moment, the Ministry and the Government is working with the UNDP, so there is a national consultation that begins next week on Monday and Tuesday and there is a few more to come in the second phase. So, there is public participation on how the public of Fiji can say how they want their police services to be and that is part of that process, and we see that, we will then look at the development. There are some consultations going on right now with regards to the Police Act 1987, that needs to be reviewed also to bring the police up to par, but as part of the security and strategy review in terms of our whole of our national security the Police review is also part of the process and its laws.

In terms of the incidental and management response, that honourable Naupoto has alluded to, at the moment the Government is working with the Government of Japan, there's been a number of processes, number of exercises not only with the government of Japan but also UNDP to strengthen the framework of this incident response management team.

In terms of the Search and Rescue Bill, that is currently under review but at the moment we have a Search and Rescue Handbook, which was developed after this report period and that was published, I think, in 2021. The National Security Strategy of course as I said is part of the national security and the defence review and we also reviewing the National Security Defence Council per say as part of the Bill which is refer to here but at the moment it has to be reviewed also.

In terms of Recommendations No. 4, Mr Speaker, I take that into account and hopefully this is something that we must improve on as noted by the Committee and hopefully when we table our next report as a Ministry into this Parliament, it is going to take cognisance of this so the Parliament can specifically recognise the kind of work that we are already doing, in terms of key performance indicators and how it should work in the workplace.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I first wish to acknowledge the Committee once again for the excellent work and the preparation of this Report and of course I do not have much to add as well after the statement by the honourable Minister. But I am glad to see the continuity in most of the work that had been undertaken.

Again, we know the importance of National Security particularly in terms of the creation of the environment for our economic growth and development as well. We are faced with so many challenges in this unpredictable world, we can say that we are safe, particularly from conventional threats but at the same time, we know how vulnerable we are when it comes to non-traditional threats, things like human trafficking, climate change, cybercrime, terrorism, drugs, et cetera, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is why as the honourable Minister has correctly stated, the overarching framework which is the National Security strategy is so important.

Work has been undertaken. It took a lot of time for it to be cleared by the Attorney General, Solicitor's General office and although the work had started before I came in as Minister very briefly in 2018, but we have managed to submit this to Cabinet, but it has not the Cabinet office, but it has not made its way into Cabinet. There are a lot of factors coming in as well, because economic security is very much related to our National Security as well, because when we have the strategy in place and the capability development particularly and other aspects that will support the National Security Strategy, that is why the status of the Economy is so important, we know what we went through, Mr Speaker, Sir.

In 2019, of course, we are still recovering from that Mr Speaker, Sir, but that is where it is and our security landscape has changed and the honourable Minister did respond to the question that was raised in this House by the honourable Assistant Minister of Finance and he has stated his intentions on the work that will continue.

On the Search and Rescue Bill, just very briefly when we had the opportunity earlier in this Parliament to talk about our response during COVID, I did mention about the idea of bringing together a common or one document to coordinate our National Emergency Response Framework or whatever we will call it. The same thing with the Search and Rescue Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as this is one of the recommendations. We had a difficulty when we had the incident in Vanua Levu a few years back because in the current laws aeronautical search is with AFL based in Nadi.

Search and Rescue, in our maritime waters even going to Tuvalu and Wallis and Futuna, is under the Fiji Navy, RFMF and it is based in Walu Bay. Land Search is under the Fiji Police Force.

So that overarching framework was to bring them together and the Bill, honourable Attorney-General, I know that it is before the Solicitor-General's Office and I hope that between the honourable Minister and yourself, Sir, this can be expedited.

Human Trafficking is a major issue. I have stated it already in this Parliament. I think the only major National Taskforce has been established and the Ministry is responsible. Perhaps the major issue that we were trying to work on particularly between the two Committees particularly with the US Government as well is just the laws because they have very specific laws on human trafficking but for us our laws is very general and perhaps this review will help us to look at some of the existing laws and particularly laws for the agencies that will be responsible: all the stakeholders that come under the Committee.

Lastly, on the RFMF Act Review and of course the Fiji Police Force we are thankful to the New Zealand Government for assisting in the RFMF Act review and I am sure as already alluded to by the honourable Minister it is ready now or on its way to Cabinet and of course the Police Review. There was a blunder by the Fiji Police Force because after the endorsement by Cabinet instead of just going for the consultations they used the word 'Bill' in that consultation when it has not come into Parliament.

As alluded to, it was sponsored by UNDP and the New Zealand Government, and I am thankful that they are going to pick it up now and continue with the work. So, in a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, it is important that we support the work particularly behind National Security because this will create the environment for us, whether it is investment or our economic growth and development and social protection as well and we need to support the honourable Minister, the Ministry and the agencies involved.

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide some remarks on this Review Report that is being tabled before the House. I agree with the mover of the motion that this Report is five years old and most of the works that are being reported here the update has been given by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs this afternoon or this evening.

However, let me just give some brief overview in terms of the Ministry of Defence and National Security responsible for Fiji's National Security including the defence of the coverage sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Ministry carries out this responsibility through the implementation of Fiji's National Security Strategy and by conducting policy oversight of two of Fiji's Discipline Forces – the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and the Fiji Police Force.

In terms of the Budget update, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Defence and National Security was allocated a budget of \$5.2 million in the 2017 and 2018 financial year for which they were able to expend \$4.8 million which is around 91 percent of the overall budget. Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the overall budget 80 percent of the budget was allocated for the operating expenditure while 14 percent was earmarked for the capital projects. The largest component of the Ministry's budget is under SEG 1 - \$1.4 million for salaries and SEG 8 - \$1.8 million which caters for special expenditures including the National Security and Defence Review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for 2023 and 2024 the current Budget the Ministry has allocated a Budget \$12.4. million. Of this around 89 percent of the Budget is allocated for Operating Expenditure while 5 percent is earmarked for the capital projects. The largest component of the Ministry's Budget is under SEG 1 which caters for salaries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the major increase in expenditure in 2023 and 2024 financial year results from the transfer of the Department of Immigration from the Office of the Prime Minister to the

Ministry of Home Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking at the recommendations that have been tabled by the Standing Committee, most of the recommendations have been updated to the House by the honourable Minister as well as the honourable Leader of the Opposition. However, I would just like to express more on the need to prior and fast track the Search and Rescue Bill. It is very important for our country looking at the number of issues that are taking place in the country in the meantime. I can just recall back in 2019 when I was the Commissioner Northern when this Cessna 172 that belongs to Pacific Flying School was involved in an accident in the very rugged terrain in Delaikoro Mountain in Macuata. We tried to mount search and rescue and the Disciplined Forces together with National Fire Authority.

In the first instance, we were very confused because there was no SOP for us to follow in terms of that operation however due to commonsense we were able to undertake that rescue operations very quickly, and I would urge the Ministry and those responsible for the Search and Rescue Bill to please enhance its enactment so that those relevant agencies are able to comprehend whenever a similar disaster takes place.

Just to round off, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of some of the issues that were raised by the Office of the Auditor-General and I want to mention it in this Report because it was during the time that this Report was being scrutinised by the Standing Committee in terms of Standing Operating Procedures and some of the things that were lacking in the Ministry during that time. The Ministry should ensure that the names of the issues that have been raised by the OAG in terms of the SOP and the operation in the Ministry should be try and addressed so that encounter this same problem when a similar situation comes into place.

I thank the Committee once again for a very spending their effort in trying to come up with a Report that is five years old. I thank the Chairperson and all the Members, and I do support the Report before Parliament.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- If I can just thank the staff of the Ministry, past and present, wish you well in the big role that you play in the security of our nation. I commend this Report to Parliament for noting.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF FISHERIES 2018-2021 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Annual Review Report of the Ministry of Fisheries for the years 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 which was tabled on 14th July, 2023.

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly the Ministry of Fisheries is mandated to manage and sustain fishing activities in the Fiji waters to ensure that Fiji's fisheries stock remain

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly the Ministry of Fisheries is mandated to manage and sustain fishing activities in the Fiji waters to ensure that Fiji's fisheries stock remain healthy and this, the Ministry continued to coordinate very well in terms of Fiji's fishing and aquaculture programmes to ensure food security and also to facilitate growth of commercial activity that helps grow the economy.

The Report Mr. Speaker, Sir, highlights the Ministry's achievements in terms of aquaculture, research and development, inshore fisheries and of course offshore fisheries as well. Perhaps, we will just focus on the recommendations on aquaculture, particularly on the need for better equipment, the expertise and the advancement of facilities and the supply of fry and feed as well.

The second recommendation is for the Ministry to ensure that there is a marked improvement in the percentage of farmers that graduate from subsistence to semi-commercial and commercial farming given the interests in aquaculture in our country.

On inshore fisheries: two recommendations:

- (1) Ensure the assessment and management of fisheries stock; and
- (2) Arrange financial assistance to fishermen, upgrade physical resources such as service centres, fence and strengthen human resources, and of course the Ministry to ensure expansion of inshore farming of oysters, seaweeds, pearl, *bech-de-mer*, clams, salt water prawns and mud crabs.

On offshore fisheries: two key recommendations:

- (1) The Committee recommends the review of the policies, Acts and regulations that govern the Fisheries sector to ensure that they are relevant and up to date; and of course
- (2) The Ministry to prioritise the training and recruitment of qualified locals and crew and collaborate with the fishing industry in terms of the acquisition of modern fishing vessels.

There is a recommendation on Conservation which is very critical as well because of sustainability. There is a need to ensure that there is proper collaboration with stakeholders and that there is consensus on the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and this is respected by community at large after the MPA has been established.

In terms of the Ministry resources, there are three recommendations, and I will not go into it. It is in the Report, Sir, and I recommend that Parliament takes it off these recommendations and we welcome the contribution from the honourable Members, and I put the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and for your information I have a list of speakers with me and the batting would be as follows. The batting will be led by honourable Joseph Nand, to be followed by the honourable Minister for Fisheries, then honourable Koroilavesau and rounded off by the Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Kamikamica.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee deliberated on the Report and resolved that the site visits be conducted to the three geographical divisions of Fiji. The Committee undertook a one-day site visit to the Central Division and a further one week visit to the Central, Western and Northern Divisions to verify its findings and gather valuable information from staff at the stations.

The Committee consulted and visited several key stakeholders that were actively involved in the fishing industry and those that were in partnership with the Ministry and the Government as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding Offshore Fisheries, the Committee noted some of the challenges faced by them and those challenges are:

- Obtaining a Fisheries Licence
This takes far too much time as it involves several different agencies including the Ministry of Fisheries for the IUU Certificate, the Ministry of Health for the Health Certificate and the University of the South Pacific for conducting laboratory tests. These delays have created substantial losses to the fishing companies and have prolonged the sale of fish to overseas markets.
- Clearance from the Customs Department
The process for obtaining clearance from the Customs Department to fish outside Fiji waters and as a result fishing companies incur unnecessary cost. The unavailability of right technology and expertise. There is also a need to purchase new vessels so that they can fish in the deeper high seas.
- Inconsistency in data held by the Ministry of Fisheries and the fishing companies. This needs to be updated and a proper SOP needs to be formulated so that data is valued and updated data is readily available.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated in the Report, the fishing companies also no longer receive assistance through the Tuna Stabilisation Fund. The Committee is concerned with the high level of illegal fishing and lack of monitoring taking place in Fiji. There is a need to strengthen monitoring and partnership with the public and raise awareness with communities.

Also, Mr. Speaker Sir, in regard to Recommendation 3.1.1, the Ministry should address and nullify the key challenges in aquaculture which include the need for the latest equipment, the right expertise and advancement of facilities, supply of fry and quality feed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the Members for their contribution and look forward to the honourable Minister and the Ministry to oversee and respond to the recommendations made in a timely manner. I wish to acknowledge the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Fisheries in all Divisions. I support the motion before this Chamber.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide a response to the Consolidated Report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for the three-year Ministry of Fisheries Annual Report for the period 2018-2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the outset, I would like to acknowledge the honourable Chairperson and the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for their assessments, findings and recommendations as outlined in the Report. This will assist the Ministry in its planning and re-focusing its priorities and resources allocation to enhance service delivery to our diverse stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the Senior Executive Team and Ministry staff for the timely submission of the Annual Report to this august Parliament. I also acknowledge my appreciation to the honourable Koroilavesau who was at the forefront in the achievements as outlined in these Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all 10 recommendations of the Standing Committees are well noted. My response will be based on what the Ministry is currently doing to progress the recommendations.

For aquaculture, the Ministry is working its level best to address the challenges identified in the report. These are the challenges that have accumulated in the past 16 years. The Ministry recognised that we cannot grow this sub-sector alone, hence, the move to engage with private sector agencies through Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the assistance of UNFAO, the Ministry is currently developing its 5-year Aquaculture Development Plan, which will be finalised in quarter three. This plan aims to address the aquaculture challenges such as commodity development, high cost of feed, expertise, hatchery production, resource allocation, etcetera, and will be the pathway for rapid growth for the aquaculture sector. This development plan is indeed long overdue, and the Coalition Government is here to make it happen. In the interest of time, allow me to list three key initiatives that are well underway to progress the recommendations under Coastal Inshore Fisheries.

- (1) The PPP is signed for mass production of seaweed. This adopts an integration model between fisheries, forestry and will extend to agriculture as part of the private sectors corporate social responsibility.
- (2) For promotion of diversification and resources allocation, we are strengthening the formation of fisher cooperatives and clusters in partnership with other Government agencies as a means of channelling support and the project to fisherfolks.
- (3) We are restoring laws and policies restricting trade of specific inshore commodities that were imposed by the previous administration. Apart from the regulations not being consulted, the decision not only affected the industrial players, but moreso Fijians who depend on these industries for their basic survival.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the next months, we will finalise a few more partnership arrangements with the private sector to assist communities who are in dire need of our support. Some of these proposals were submitted to the previous government, though feasible, but were not considered. More update will be provided in this august Parliament when the engagements are sealed and implementation underway.

On the recommendation on policies and legislations, I wish to advise that the Ministry will be finalising key policy legislative framework in consultation with the Office of the Solicitor-General before the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the fisheries policy and laws were shelved by the previous government for reason only known to them. My Ministry is in full support of the protection on the development of crews on fishing vessels, their safety and well-being. The approval of Fiji National Offshore Crew Policy in the last months attests to this strong commitment of the Coalition Government. The Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are areas designated and managed for the long-term conservation of marine resources, ecosystems services and/or cultured heritage. I agree that the establishment and maintenance of MPAs requires greater collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders.

The MPA subject matter unveils the need to maintain a balance between conservation and production as we have multiple users of our waters. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bottom line is to ensure that the communities continue to have a source of livelihood and income generation when international commitments are made when the MPAs are established.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will agree with me, that people are the most important resources in any one organisation. Capacity building, training, and staff retention strategies are always part of the Strategic Workforce Plan and Succession planning of the Ministry.

In my visit to all fisheries stations in the Central, Western and Northern Divisions in the last 10 months, I can attest to the recommendations provided by the Standing Committee that the stations and quarters have really deteriorated and needed immediate renovations.

For 2023 to 2024, I acknowledge the support from the Coalition Government for mainstreaming and upgrading of offices and quarters budget back to the Ministry's budgetary allocation. In the previous administration, this was placed under Head 50 which was very difficult to access.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me this opportunity and I also thank the Chairperson and the Committee for the Report before Parliament. At the outset, I would like to state my support to the motion before Parliament. What else can I say, Mr. Speaker, after the honourable Minister of Fisheries has already alluded to the various developments that he has developed over the last nine months. I can only say in the background what the recommendations that have been stated and maybe give an overview of what the Ministry had done as reported by the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report covered 2018-2021. The development on the Ministry of Fisheries was greatly challenged by a lot of work that were to be carried out when it was established as a different Ministry (an independent one in 2017).

At that time the Ministry of Fisheries was tasked to establish an Inshore Fisheries and at the same time we co-chaired the Ocean Conference in New York with the Government of Sweden and then we attended COP23 in Bonn, Germany.

On that note, I wish to mention the first Permanent Secretary, Commander Sanaila Naqali who was very influential in the establishment as an independent Ministry of Fisheries and also his work in Bangkok with the establishment of the various agencies that were able to assist the Ministry in the years after 2017 and 2018.

Mr. Speaker, the rebuilding of Makogai as a fisheries station took a lot of time after *TC Winston*. The whole station was totally wiped out. It cost about \$11 million to rebuild, that took a lot of energy and funds to rebuild and then we had to rebuild Caboni. It was also totally destroyed by the same cyclone - *TC Winston*. I must thank the Ministry staff for being able to continue the work and at the same time they were carrying out the rebuild of these two Fisheries Stations.

The honourable Minister has alluded to the recommendations that had been given. Recommendation one under aquaculture, he is saying that there needs to be equipment for feed and also the supply of fry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a machine at Naduruloulou, I think that was supplied by either Taiwan or India. It has been broken down for about five years. Since the equipment was so old, we could not find the spare parts. The initiation was basically for the aquaculture farmers to bring in their feed, put it through the machine and then collect the feed and go feed whatever they are breeding - tilapia, shrimp or prawns but, unfortunately, we could not get the parts from overseas because the machine was so old.

The other point that I wanted to raise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is Recommendation 3.2.1 on Inshore fisheries on the management of fisheries stock in our coastal waters. This is a huge challenge challenge. Even though we were assisted by MPI New Zealand, the legislation took a lot of time to develop so that we are able to monitor and make the assessment. So, basically the challenge for Government now is to make sure that the recommendation that has been given is carried out.

It is quite an extensive but a very expensive exercise also. I hope the honourable Minister for Fisheries will carry that forward because this will basically assist the resource owners within the *qoliqoli* areas. That basically covers the area from the shoreline to the outer reef. If this is funded properly and governed with the demarcated areas, for the traditional *qoliqoli* owners it will assist them in generating revenue out of their various boundaries.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure we have been throwing bombs at each other for long enough and I will be very brief in my contribution today.

Firstly, I have to say Mr. Speaker, Sir, in rising to contribute to the Ministry of Fisheries Report, it is quite clear that the Ministry of Fisheries has been actually investing a lot into trying to develop the fisheries industry in Fiji. So, my comments will be more forward-looking rather than trying to nit-pick the Report.

I agree with the recommendations made and there was one particular comment in the Report that caught my attention and is probably where our Ministry would like to focus. That was a comment, Sir, which said that “the Committee was impressed with the research undertaken by J. Hunter Pearls, and they appear to have one of the best research facilities in Fiji”. I think the key to unlocking the fisheries industry and agriculture is a concerted effort to get commercial agriculture and commercial aquaculture going in our country. That is where the Ministry of Trade is actually laser focused.

We can see that there has been so much work done by all the Ministries over the last few years, but the missing equation is actually the need to attract investors to come and play in this area. I can happily report that I am being talking actively to two possible potential investors, but we need more, and I think if that happens we will surely unlock the potential in fisheries and agriculture as alluded to quite succinctly by the honourable Minister of Agriculture this morning.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker Sir, I just thought to also acknowledge the comments around the fishermen in the North and the need for the NDP programme to try and link up to the Northern fishermen in terms of storage access. We are doing a lot on the supply of boats and outboard motors but I think certainly in terms of trying to get their produce to market needs freezers and that is probably an area where the Government and certainly the Ministry of Trade can assist the Ministry of Fisheries in terms of going forward in this very promising and area of high potential.

Mr. Speaker, like I promised, I will be brief. I support the recommendations before Parliament and thank the Committee for their contribution in producing a Consolidated Report.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wish to acknowledge the honourable Members who have contributed and of course the honourable Minister as well for his response. Because it is a bipartisan report, I will hold back the rod from attacking the honourable Minister, but of course, the importance of the sector and the need for us to raise the production levels and bring in the new technologies and so forth is so important. I hope that Government will continue to support the Ministry of Fisheries.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT-
MINISTRY OF CIVIL SERVICE 2016-2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the ‘Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Civil Service 2016, 2016–2017, 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 Annual Reports’ which was tabled on the 14th July, 2023.

HON. I.S. VANAVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I beg to second the motion. Thank you.

HON. RATU. R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I begin, allow me to pay tribute to one of the long-serving, former civil servant and Diplomat, also a Cabinet Minister in two previous Governments, Mr. Poseci Bune.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Committee Report was tabled in July of this year, and I wish to proceed directly to reiterating some of the main areas of discussion that the Committee has captured in the Report.

To begin with, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were a few pertinent issues identified by the Committee which include the independence of the Public Service Commission in relation to the establishment of the Ministry of Civil Service. The types of complaints handled by the Business Unit and Customer Care Call Centre within the Ministry, the measures undertaken by the Ministry to reduce its operation costs, financial discrepancies noted in the Ministries Annual Report for the period 2016-2017.

The recruitment issues identified with the Ministry of Civil Service, which were noted in the 2017 and 2018 period. The types of certification which had been issued by the Ministry as noted in the 2018 and 2019 period, and Mr. Speaker, Sir, the efforts put in place by the Ministry in terms of contribution to the achievement of SDG 5 – the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and SDG 16 – the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these issues were addressed and clarified by the Ministry of Civil Service, and any information on this can be retrieved from the Committee’s Report. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will dive straight into the recommendations put forth by the Committee for the consideration of Parliament, and these are: the Committee has recommended that the Ministry of Civil Service provide a timely submission of its Annual Reports to Parliament for effective and efficient review by the Standing Committees.

The Committee commends the Ministry for responding to the issues raised by the Committee which it believes specifies the improvements and progress made and, likely to be noted in the Ministry’s next Annual Report. The Committee recommends that the Ministry continue to build its Human Resource capacity with an area focused on the gap between new incoming civil servants and civil servant retirees.

The Committee recommends that the Ministry implements a Policy that should bond Graduates to the Civil Service to serve within Fiji. The Committee further recommends that the Ministry works with the National Employment Centre to retain experienced staff. The Committee further recommends that the Ministry strengthens the communication, sharing of information and data across Ministries to uplift Civil Service in all Ministries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee further recommends that there be certain trainings to boost performance and upskilling of civil servants. The Committee further recommends that incentives and benefits are provided to civil servants to prevent mass turn-over of staff.

The Committee further recommends that the Ministry adopts the Private Sector strategy by working with the Universities to align graduates to various employment needs required by relevant ministries that is attachment programmes.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee recommends that there be an overall review of the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) across Government Ministries.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity and I urge honourable Members to take note of the Committee's Report and I commend this Report to Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and having the list before me provided by the Whips, order of speakers is as follows:

- (1) Honourable Hem Chand;
- (2) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
- (3) Honourable Penioni Ravunawa; and
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Review Report of the Ministry of Civil Service. At the outset, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for the Report.

The Ministry of Civil Service is a critical ministry. This Ministry was established in 2016 to support government ministries in carrying out their constitutional functions while maintaining its central co-ordination of key areas to ensure consistencies across the Civil Service. The Ministry of Civil Service did very well during the period under review. I have noted from the Report some key highlights and achievements of the Ministry during the period under review.

One of the significant highlights is that the Ministry made significant strides in its efforts towards gender equality by achieving 59 percent of female representation through OMRS. Mr. Speaker, Sir, under OMRS it is open and transparent and designed to attract people from diverse experiences and professional abilities. Thanks to FijiFirst Government for initiating and introducing OMRS. The recent selection and appointment of advisory councillors was not based on merit. Talks are that some people got selected without applying. How was the selection and appointment of advisory councillors done and who did the selection? This is the question people are asking.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are not civil servants, get that right ...

HON. H. CHAND.- Due to time constraints, I will be focusing on two of the recommendations made by the Committee. I will focus on incentives and benefits to be provided to civil servants to prevent mass turnover of staff. Looking at the mass turnover of Civil Service this year, I suggest that certain incentives and benefits are provided to civil servants without delay to address the brain and skills drain to overseas employment by members of the Civil Service. The members of the Civil Service are asking for pay increase and justification of the pay increase by civil servants is based on sky-rocketing price increases in consumer goods as well as for services.

The cost of basic essential food items has increased, VAT has increased since 1st August, 2023 and this has been putting pressure on civil servants. I urge Government to prioritise the civil servants' salary review and increase civil servants' pay as promised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now I will focus on the second recommendation that the Ministry adopts the private sector's strategy by working with the universities to align graduates to various employment needs. Yesterday, I raised a question on market employability survey, and I was caught by surprise when honourable Minister for Education informed Parliament that Government grant was allocated to Pacific Polytechnic College without carrying out market employability survey. We should remember that this is taxpayers' money and it should be used wisely and not willy nilly.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Nonsense.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is questionable and raise serious concerns. Taxpayers are demanding answers on why and how grant was allocated to Pacific Polytech without carrying out market employability survey.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. H. CHAND.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Committee's Report and I support the motion before the House.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also support the motion before the House and I commend the Standing Committee Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Reports that are being reported on by the Committee are very clear and what they have laid out and the Report of the Committee after review of those Annual Reports are also very clear.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember the end of 1966 when Fiji was gearing towards Independence. There was a Government Training Centre and it was receiving sixth formers from schools to prepare them for employment in the Civil Service while Fiji was moving away from the colonial service to our own preparing for independence.

We did a very interesting two weeks and then we were ready to be posted out as Assistant DOs and so forth. I was still waiting for mine when I got a call from camp to come and join the Army and that was the end of my Civil Service. Earlier on I had called the Permanent Secretaries to come for a workshop and I could see that they are very well qualified men and women, all highly motivated to work and I find that the recommendations are very easy to implement and we promised to do that. I am sure we can continue to develop great servants of the people in our Civil Service at the moment, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Minister responsible for the Public Service, I take on board all the recommendations and the Permanent Secretary for the Public Service and I have already put into place a programme to continue the training of particularly the senior and it go down to the Deputy Secretaries and so forth to try and adapt them and their work ethics and particularly teamwork across all Ministries so that they know what they are there for and they know the population that they are serving.

I commend the civil servants for the work they are doing. They have very difficult working conditions and we also understand the fluidity in the labour market at the moment. People are so marketable, they are so well qualified and whoever comes up with a better deal they will probably

move to. That does not mean that they are not loyal, they are loyal to their performance, they would like to perform to the best of their ability where the Government can afford what they demand for their services or not it is another matter. We know there are some very highly qualified people there, who would easily get better paid job outside the Civil Service. When we cannot compete, we cannot compete and I thank the Committee for their work and I support the motion.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be given this opportunity to speak on the motion for debate this afternoon. In fact, I would like to speak on two recommendations outlined by the Committee, consolidated in their review report for the year 2016-2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Civil Service Reform came about during this time where the effort was put into excellence in the services of the civil servant across all Ministries and Departments. It is during this time, I remember honourable Agni Deo Singh and I were also members of the Employers Representatives in the negotiation that led up to a Job Evaluation Exercise that was effective in 2018, which saw an increase in salaries a lot for doctors, teachers and principals for schools and across the Civil Service. I thank the Committee for the recommendation to review the OMRS, as there are certain parts of the OMRS system that need to be improved in terms of the performance guideline and the rewards that are needed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report provided a comprehensive analysis of the three year-report with the Committee recommendations. Specifically, I will be focusing on Recommendation No. 8 and Recommendation No. 10.

Recommendation No. 8 put forth by the Committee for the Ministry of Civil Service is to develop and implement incentives and tangible benefit for staffs across the Civil Service. The objective of this recommendation is to address the issues of massive staff turnover, as mentioned by the honourable Prime Minister, within the Civil Service. It recognises the importance of providing an attractive incentive to employees, which can contribute significantly to staff retention and overall productivity.

In light of this recommendation, it is crucial for the Ministry of Civil Service to carefully evaluate the existing incentive and the benefit structure and identify areas that can be improved in the process. By introducing effective and competitive incentive, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry can incentivise staff and address the problem of high staff turnover, thus, strengthen its workforce.

Moving on to Recommendation No. 10, the Committee emphasised the need for an overall review of the OMRS. Mr. Speaker, Sir, OMRS is defined as a system of appointing employees based on their ability to do the job and assess against the objective selection criteria which do not discriminate or give preference to any group or individual. This recommendation aims to ensure the transparency and fairness in the recruitment process across the Civil Service.

To implement this recommendation, the Ministry of Civil Service should undertake a comprehensive review of the OMRS system, as I have mentioned. This review should entail an examination of the existing policy and the regulation pertaining to recruitment, retirement and other relevant factors. Mr. Speaker, Sir, by providing clarity, the Ministry can bring greater transparency and confidence in the recruitment process, promotion and also promoting a fair and equitable working environment for our Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I extend my gratitude to the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights for their diligence scrutiny and evaluation of the Ministry of Civil Service Annual Report, 2016 to 2019. Their effort has enabled us to commend the deliberation in Parliament today. I would like to also express my utmost support to the executives of the Ministry of Civil

Service and its dedicated staff in embracing and implementing the 10-key recommendations put forth by the Committee. These recommendations hold significant potential in fortifying the Civil Service and advancing its effectiveness. I fully support the recommendations put forward by the Committee.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try to be brief. I want to thank the honourable Prime Minister for pointing out the changes that the Government has already made. When we came into Government, we had promised that we will raise the retirement age from 55 years to 60 years. We have done that and it was very ill-conceived against the international thinking, where most countries were actually raising retirement age, we did the opposite, and we can see when those who were responsible for doing that, never thought about situations like these where the global labour market will change as a result of post-COVID.

In 2022, we lost the largest number of people, particularly from the formal sector because countries like Australia and New Zealand provided avenues for work visa where people could go on student visa and work 40 hours. There was this huge exodus of people from, not only the civil servants, but the formal sector in Fiji as well.

The decision by the Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of raising the retirement age to 60 and moving away from contractual employment has actually provided much better incentives and motivation for our civil servants to do better. The recommendations that are there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not want to go into the details, but the Ministry is working on all of them, in particular, addressing issues of high rates of attrition. For example, the Ministry is now looking at graduate internship, making sure that we hire people from universities who are coming out as new graduates so that they go through a process of training in a workplace, attachments and then be absorbed within the Civil Service as and when needed.

The use of Section 127(8) of the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have talked about that. It is in the Constitution, there is nothing we can do about it, but this Government moved the Ministry of Public Service under the Prime Minister, under whom the Public Service Commission is also based.

The Public Service Commission, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is only responsible for appointing the Permanent Secretaries, but under the Constitution, the Permanent Secretaries has absolute power but with the agreement of the Ministers. What was happening in the past, the Ministers were actually making appointments and it happened, Mr. Speaker, Sir in many cases.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are lying.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In many cases, I tell you how it was happening.

HON. S. NAND.- Enough of your lies.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You had Committees, ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- We do not work with liars.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, is very clear.

HON. A. BIA.- Too much lies.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Permanent Secretary will hire, fire with the agreement of the Minister, every Minister, every appointment.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Point of Order. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 74. I would request the honourable Minister to bring proof about appointments being made that were made by Ministers and not according to the processes.

HON. PROF.B.C. PRASAD.- Let me just read this for the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They do not want to listen to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not want to listen to the truth. Section 127(8) of the Constitution states, “The Permanent Secretary of each Ministry with the agreement of the Minister responsible for the Ministry has the authority to determine all matters pertaining to the employment.” The OMRS was a system, where the Committee will meet, make the recommendation, the final ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Point of Order. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have raised my Point of Order and I demand that the honourable Minister bring proof to this august Parliament about the allegations that he had made, and I would kindly request a ruling on my Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I have not made a ruling yet, because his still on the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition has made a Point of Order and you have listened to it, but let me just explain.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The OMRS, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministers are still signing-off the appointments, so you have a process but the final decision of an appointment through that process rests with the Minister, he does not understand that. That is what I mean when I say, the final agreement of the appointment is made by the Minister.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- You are lying.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If the Minister does not sign it, the appointment cannot be done. That is what was happening.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Enough of your lies. How can we trust this government?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Now, the Public Service Commission, despite ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... what is in the Constitution, the practise that this Government has adopted, we have empowered the Public Service Commission, we have given the appropriate budget and the Public Service Commission will review the OMRS. We have allocated \$126,000 in the budget for that review so that there is no political interference in the appointment of the Civil Service.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order !

HON. V. NATH.- You are lying.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- You are lying.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It hurts. The truth hurts.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You heard what they are saying. This is the fact, this is what has happened. I want to ask the honourable Leader of the Opposition, was he not signing the final appointments for his Ministry?

HON. J. USAMATE.- We concur.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I do not make the appointments, I endorse the process.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This Constitution says, “with the agreement” and if the Minister chooses not to, that appointment cannot be done. It is simple, simple language. They cannot understand this simple language and he is demanding information.

One final point, Mr. Speaker, the honourable ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash. Absolute hogwash.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... Hem Chand said advisory councillors, he does not know, he was a civil servant that advisory councillors are not civil servants. They are community driven and they were the biggest abusers of the appointment process of the advisory councillors.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- You are making more money.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It actually hurts them, they cannot take it because this is a government which is changing the processes, making it more transparent and accountable. And the civil servants Mr. Speaker, are happy, they are more motivated and they are coming here and not admitting that what they did in terms of retirement age, in terms of contractual employment destroyed the motivation, the incentive, the work environment within the Civil Service. This Government has restored that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have before me two complaints that were lodged in this august Parliament. One by honourable Sachida Nand, and the other one by honourable Prof. Biman Prasad as well, similar to what has been raised in a Point of Order here.

The issue about the Point of Order raised by the honourable Leader of the Opposition is on the comment that was made by the Deputy Prime Minister, but I have allowed time for him to explain the reason why he said what he said. Now he is backing it up with the OMRS and what the Constitution says, so I will be delivering my two judgements on the two cases now on Friday. So, I will be given enough time for us to look over the *Hansard Reports* because we are trying to be very specific here, at the same time we have to allow the process for him to explain himself. So that will come on Friday before we adjourn.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments, just a little two cent contribution. I am very thankful that the honourable Minister responsible for Civil Service and the honourable Prime Minister has given confidence in this Parliament that all the

recommendations by the Committee has been taken on board and that he has made programmes of liaising with his Permanent Secretary.

On that note, this was a bipartisan Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I am thankful that the Opposition were praising the OMRS and I am thankful to honourable Ravunawa, who has also alluded to the point that it needs a review and their recommendation came by way of bipartisan.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament so that you may enjoy the dinner that is being prepared in the Big Committee Room. We still have two more reports to go through before we finish for the night. I hope you will enjoy your dinner and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.06 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.06 p.m.

**REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS
2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Youth and Sports 2019 to 2020 Annual Report which was tabled on 11th September, 2023.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's core responsibilities are focussed on facilitating Youth and Sports Development through the establishment of a conducive policy environment that provides strategic support systems, initiatives for personal development and character building, sports policy implementation and community based youth-led programmes.

There are two core programmes coordinated and facilitated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports:

- (1) Youth Development - this programme centres on the provision of assistance to youths through advisory empowerment and capacity building including specific skills training.
- (2) Sports Development - the programme focuses on the development of sports and its infrastructure nationwide through the provision of grants to the Fiji National Sports Commission, the National Sporting Organisations and Fiji Sports Council as well as the provision of basic sports equipment and the development of rural playing field.

Mr. Speaker, the financial year of 2019/2020 was the beginning of an extremely challenging era and the Ministry's rapid response plan in the wake of the global pandemic through the announcement and implementation of the youth farm initiative programme.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry continued with its programmes under the Youth Empowerment Programme and simultaneously carried out the implementation of the Civil Service Reforms.

The Ministry continued conducting accredited training at its five youth training centres, mobile skills training continued to be rolled out across the four Divisions and there was a notable increase in the number of youth attending these trainings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the development of sports is ongoing with the Ministry through close collaboration with Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC). In raising our sporting standards, experts were brought in to enhance the participation of youth in local and international sports. In addition, the Ministry also conducts programmes through its own initiative targeting youth groups.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years the Ministry continued to uphold an all-inclusive approach towards sports development in the country and ensure that all Fijians receive equal access to sports and sporting facilities regardless of gender, background or ability.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and before I offer the floor, I also have a list before me provided by the Whips. The first speaker from the Opposition will be honourable Viam Pillay, then we will alternate to the honourable Minister for Youth before honourable Ketan Lal and then it is honourable Assistant Minister for Women to round it off.

Finally, you are speaking honourable Ketan Lal as I have got your name on the list here.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Sir only for five minutes.

MR. SPEAKER.- Five minutes is too little for you?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Okay, because you love heckling from the back there.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my remarks on the findings of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs which conducted its review of the Ministry of Youth and Sports Annual Report 2019 – 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were few Committee findings that the Committee compiled during the deliberation. These were students dropping out of training centres due to financial constraints, peer pressure, home sickness and disciplinary issues. To enable a 100 percent graduation of students, the Ministry worked on including a parent's day at Youth Training Centres. The Ministry also in adopting a collaborative approach with the NGO to address peer pressure while providing guidance to youths through training and continuous monitoring from respective divisions which is ongoing.

The Ministry is also having partnerships with its stakeholders, for example, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the iTaukei Affairs Board for the respective provincial councils to support development, iTaukei youths inclusion of programmes such as leadership training by having guest speakers at Youth Training Centres to provide guidance and inspire youths to become successful through the programmes offered and permitting a second chance to the school dropouts for course completion in the future.

Apart from the courses offered in different Youth Training Centres, there is a need for the Ministry to diversify the courses offered online with current market demands. As such, the Ministry is continuing to innovate and explore opportunities with the stakeholders to diversify the courses offered at the current facilities and to work with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations and other stakeholders in addressing student dropouts and increase the number of graduates. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this Review, the Committee highlighted various areas that needs to be strengthened by the Ministry and relevant recommendations formulated for resolution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years the Ministry had continued to uphold an all-inclusive approach towards sports development in the country and ensure that all Fijians receive equal access to sports and sporting facilities regardless of gender, background or ability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few remarks, I support the motion.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the core roles of the Ministry of Youth and Sports is, there are two core roles, one is on Youth Development and second on Sports Development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Youth and Sports aims to accelerate sports development in Fiji by encouraging the promotion of sporting activities through effective networking relationships with communities, voluntary groups, local authorities and national governing bodies such as the Fiji National Sports Commission, the Fiji Sports Council and Boxing Commission of Fiji. For the past six years, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been allocated a budget of around \$95.2 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2023-2024 Financial year the Ministry has been allocated a total

budget of \$19.5 million to further expand and enhance sports development programmes whilst simultaneously ensuring that adequate investment is being made into the upgrade of sporting infrastructure around the nation

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Youth and Sports also continues to ensure that our youths, the future leaders of tomorrow are empowered and that necessary capacity building trainings are made available to allow them to improve the individual livelihoods.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports continues to ensure that youths in various communities around the nation have accessed conducive sporting facilities and necessary sporting equipment made possible through partnerships with local clubs and schools.

Additionally, the Ministry prioritises the development and training of Fijian youth through youth capacity building and training programme that develop youths life skills for their personal, mental and spiritual development.

The Ministry has five Youth Training Centres around the country namely Nasau in Sigatoka, Yavitu in Kadavu, Naleba in Macuata, Naqere in Savusavu and Valelevu in Suva. The various trainings that are covered under this programme include the following Mobile Skills Training, Youth Coast Care Club, Empowerment Training, Youth Group Registrations, Youth Outreach and Monitoring Youth Entrepreneurship and the Youth Volunteers.

These training programmes provide a learning environment for young people that may extend beyond boundaries or classrooms and incorporate the wealth of knowledge and experiences from the experienced trainers. All training offered at the Youth Training Centres by the Ministry are free of charge and it gives a second chance for our children who have dropped out from formal education. The Ministry is working very closely with the Fiji National University to deliver specialise courses for our youth around the country that will prepare them for employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we talk about the impact of sports development, sporting infrastructure with assistance of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the following are identified as impacts on the ground:

- (1) Increase in physical activity and sports participation. The smartest way to tackle NCDs and other health issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to invest in sports infrastructure, sports facilities.
- (2) The accessibility of sporting facility is the best way to address activities among youths in red zone areas in our urban centres is to invest in sports facilities as well. When we engage our youths to sports activities, they are able to come out from other activities. The creation of Sports Associations in communities. Sports Development Programme has also assisted the establishment of Community Sports Association and that has been noted to be established around the country.

The other point that I wish to highlight here is on the impact of sports on the ground and that it has created income-generation and the marketability of our sports people. When we invest in sports, we are investing in sporting facilities, and it not only provides income-generating opportunities, but creates a pathway for our sports people to excel, to be marketable and gain employment. Some of them got their contracts overseas and are now playing overseas because of sports.

The last item I want to highlight in my presentation: Mr. Speaker, Sir, additionally the Ministry continues to acknowledge the contributions made by elite sports personnel within the field

of sports, and the need to establish the National Academy. I think it is something that had been pointed by the reports.

The need to establish the National Academy of sports is something that I wish to highlight in my presentation this evening. The Cabinet papers for the establishment of the National Sports Academy, were prepared and presented to Cabinet through the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Regrettably, Cabinet's approval was not received. But I wish to reassure Parliament again today that the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in line with its 5-year Strategic Plan, is working towards the establishment of the National Academy of Sports.

I would like to thank the Committee for their Report, and I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know it is quite late, I will try to be as quick as possible and finish within the five minutes. I rise to contribute to the report that is before us, and I thank the Committee Members and the specific Ministry for their support in getting this report to Parliament.

I note one of the important recommendations that has come to this Parliament, and that is to continue and build on youth grant initiatives that will elevate and strengthen youth development in Fiji. I also note that in 2019 and 2020 no new sports ground were developed and that is because of COVID-19 and lots of restrictions.

Also, majority of our sports construction materials do come from overseas, and they are of different quality, and they are not made in Fiji. But, as always, when I speak, I do get something up here. It is important for us to focus on finding various avenues to strengthen our youth community. Our youth community is the future of Fiji, and I wished the honourable Professor Prasad would be present here but, unfortunately, he left.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we fast track to 2023, our young people are worried about how the Coalition Government will strengthen the youth development, because this Government is already making ill-advised decisions. One of them is the regular constitutional breaches, and this is in relation to the recommendation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member you should be speaking on the content of the report.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is on strengthening youth development. We need to find avenues and the youth are worried that the Government's decision so far has not allowed them to have confidence in having the ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Potholes.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Not potholes but there are many other things. Youths are worried about the recent reshuffle by the Government. The recent vote at the UN, the recent decision on Japan's Nuclear Waste Released and just today we highlighted an important issue about a social media app. which was used to share nude photos of girls.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are talking about the Ministry of Youth. It is our Ministry, it is for the youth. They are there for the youths. It is the Ministry's responsibilities to look after our needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government needs to make sure that their policies must be youth-focussed because youths are the future of Fiji. If the Government's policies are not youth-focussed the youth will not have any confidence in the Government. I urge the honourable Minister for

Youth and Sports to continue the collaborations you have with youth organisations. You can also come to us. We can also give you some advice.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said that there is a lot of ill-advised decisions by the Government, just like the reshuffle. We hope that there was no reshuffle but unfortunately the new Attorney-General, I am sorry the Attorney-General is still here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have highlighted before that our youths are the most important citizens of Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have said that three times.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Mr. Speaker. Sir, since you have picked up what I have said three times I hope the Government picked it up because they have called us a lot of names. Just a while ago I think, honourable Prasad called us looters. Unfortunately, we are youth MPs here as well. We are not looters. We are here representing the people and the youths as well.

With those words, I commend this Report to Parliament and I hope this Government will continue to work towards or for the youths, Sir.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Leader of Opposition, Ministers, Assistant Minister and Members of Parliament: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts since the honourable Minister has covered a lot on what sports is doing for our youths. Let me respond to the last Member who has talked about youths development.

The current Coalition Government is extremely concerned about youths and has done a lot within the last few months.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Tell them!

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, the National Youth Policy was not updated since 2014 and the Ministry had stopped working with the National Youth Council.

Under the current Government this year the National Youth Council has been recognised. There is an AGM planned later this year.

HON. P.K. BALA.- When?

HON. S. KIRAN.- The National Youth Policy has been approved by the Cabinet.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Why Cabinet? Why not youths?

HON. S. KIRAN.- For the National Youth Policy to be adopted it has to go through Cabinet. Maybe, you, I am not aware of that. Youth can be very wide age range and needs a vision to ensure youth development programmes are relevant.

I personally have been very inspired by the vision of the current Youth Minister who has taken the time to listen to the National Youth Council that the Ministry had previously stopped working with.

The honourable Minister also took his time to spend time with and listen to street kids living

in a vacant house in Lautoka. Mr. Speaker, Sir, listening to a wide range of voices, the Ministry and the honourable Minister has evolved a wide range of programmes for youth. This year we saw the Ministry of Youth evolve youth fields in three districts encouraging unemployed youths to come and engage and learn.

The Ministry of iTaukei worked with the Ministry of Youth to try and encourage unemployed youths to attend the fair. Training institutes and employers had booths and enrolled youths in employment and training courses, a batch of street kids also joined the fair. A hotel chain was able to get 130 CVs in the West from this youth fair, a construction company in Suva and another hotel in Suva said that they were able to recruit 30 youths each through this employment fair.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka.*

HON. S. KIRAN.- Having engaged with private sector the Ministry has developed programmes relevant to the market, has created the database and employment pathways. Ministries have open its doors for unemployed youths including street kids to its programmes and training institutions.

While the Ministry works on youth development through sports and music the current Minister has ensured youth engagement in development programmes including operationalising Kadavu Vocational Training Centre as a shared partnering with Fiji National University to offer 14 market relevant courses. So I wish to commend the Ministry's work under the visionary leadership of honourable Jese Saukuru that have engaged in a wide range of partnerships to ensure relevant programmes for all youth in Fiji.

I wish to say thank you to the Committee for the report and I wish to support the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all the honourable Members that contributed to the motion before the House and I would like to also wish the honourable Minister a very best in taking on board the Committee recommendations and hope that the honourable Minister will take the Ministry to greater heights in future. With that being said Sir, I have no further comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT-FIJI NATIONAL SPORTS COUNCIL 2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Fiji National Sports Council 2017-2018 Annual Report, which was tabled on 11th September, 2023.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, the Fiji Sports Council is responsible for planning, constructing, maintaining and delivering high quality venues and facilities for sports at all levels from high performance athletes to community recreational activities.

The Council has more than delivered on its promise with the official opening of its head office

and FMF gymnasium complex in January of 2018. The Fiji Sports Council emphasises the social and economic importance of sports in Fiji through modern sporting facilities that are now beginning to be established around the country particularly in rural areas. Through key investments and support from government more young people are beginning to see sports as a serious career path.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee noted that there were achievements in the 2017 – 2018 financial year, the most memorable one which has the greatest long term impact was the commissioning of the new Fiji Sports Council head office and the reopening of the refurbished FMF gymnasium.

Further to this, Government supported redevelopment of the Vodafone Arena which began in March of 2018. Following the renovations, the Vodafone Arena is the first venue in Fiji to assist Weightlifting Fiji in hosting the International Weightlifting Federation (World Junior Championships). It was also noted that netball Fiji had also won the bid to host the World Youth Championship in 2022 however, this did not eventuate due to COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, the refurbished facilities of the Fiji National Sports Council has contributed to the health and wellbeing of all Fijians by providing venues and facilities for sport and active recreational activities that bring people from all walks of life together. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Empty drum makes the loudest noise and I hope the message reaches to the respective speakers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Sports Commission and Ministry of Youth work together, they connect to each other. So that is why I thought that I will clarify, on the National Youth Council and on the National Youth Policy.

On the National Youth Council, this was the initiative of FijiFirst.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Never used it!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- We ran that Council, when the term expired, we did not appoint any members for the Council. The reason being ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- The reason was, what we decided at that time, that we need to go around the country, form youth clubs ...

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Still going around.

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... and then appoint the National Youth Council.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hogwash!

HON. P.K. BALA.- That was the whole idea. Consult people, listen to people! That is what we believed in! Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. MEMBER.- Eight years.

HON. P.K. BALA.- And on the, not eight years, it was only last year, you go and get your facts right, *yaar*!

(Laughter)

Sometimes I do not expect such things from you my brother. On the National Youth Policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the works were carried out in regard to the National Youth Policy. There were stakeholders who were involved in preparing this National Youth Policy and we were on the verge of presenting to Cabinet, but at that point in time, the FijiFirst Government felt that this is not the right time to present. More time is needed.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- More time is needed to go around and consult some other stakeholders and then bring it. That is where the story ended. It is not that we were roaming around, it is not that we were not doing anything.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject).- Overseas.

HON. P.K. BALA. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to contribute on the review of the Fiji Sports Council 2017-2018 Annual Report. Sir, I will be very brief and straight to the point. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Sports Council was established in 1978 by the Act of Parliament, and I am sorry to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, through my observation and research, that from 1978 to 2008, there was no or very little works carried out, in particular, capital works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the game changer began from 2007 and onwards at the Fiji Sports Council. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank and acknowledge the work of the former CEO, Litiana. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Litiana's contribution to the Fiji Sports Council has been outstanding, and I wish her very well in her future endeavours.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will inform this House what is happening at the Fiji Sports Council right now. They have been talking about accountability, they have been talking about transparency and under the leadership of my good friend, from the West.

(Laughter)

These things are happening. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to bring to the attention of this Parliament, on the award of the project work, one of the Australian Companies for the supply and installation and commissioning of full track works by the Fiji Sports Council which was definitely approved by the new Board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wish to know whether this is the same company that was involved in a case whereby an employee of Water Authority of Fiji received \$500 from this company.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Come on man.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What do you mean ‘come on’, who are you?

(Laughter)

You keep shut. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if this is the same company, then how and why this contract was given knowing very well that the Government financial policy does not allow to engage any contractor or firm who are involved in bribery.

I hope Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the honourable Minister, my good friend from West will table a report in regard to this after proper and thorough investigation into this.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Not only that Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am very reliably informed that the vehicles have been bought, staff salaries have been increased without the Board’s approval.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Please, check on this, I think this is enough for my good friend, honourable Minister for Youth and Sports and I want to thank the Chairperson of the Committee and the Committee Members for the work that they have been carrying out in regards to the Fiji Sports Council.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the former Minister for Youth and Sports for his contribution this evening. It is another story like the municipal council.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Do you want me to open my mouth?

(Laughter)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- In the last six financial years, Fiji Sports Council has received around \$8.3 million as grant assistance to support its operational activities which include the payment of properties, insurance and utilities for all its sports facilities. In the 2023-2024 financial year the funding of \$670,000 is allocated to finance the principal loan payment to ANZ for the refurbishment of the Vodafone Arena. The Fiji Sports Council currently maintains 18 sporting properties on behalf of the Government. The list is as follows:

- (1) HFC Bank Stadium;
- (2) Vodafone Arena;
- (3) FMF Gymnasium;
- (4) National Fitness Centre;
- (5) Damodar City Aquatic Centre;
- (6) National Netball Centre;
- (7) National Hockey Centre;
- (8) National Beach Court;
- (9) Multipurpose Court;
- (10) National Sailing Centre;
- (11) Victoria Tennis Courts;
- (12) Narauiyaba Sports Ground in Ra;
- (13) Lawaqa Park;

- (14) Veivadravadra in Sigatoka;
- (15) Lautoka Regional Tennis Courts;
- (16) Stanley Brown Boxing Gym;
- (17) Suva Lawn Tennis Courts; and
- (18) Thompson Park.

To date some of the major sporting development projects attained by the Fiji Sports Council include:

- (1) 2018 - the upgrade of the FMF Gymnasium;
- (2) 2019 - the upgrade of the Vodafone Arena;
- (3) 2023 - the upgrade of the National Hockey Centre;
- (4) 2023 - the upgrade of the Damodar City Aquatic Centre;
- (5) 2023 - upgrade of the Lautoka Regional Tennis Courts; and
- (6) 2023 - upgrade of the Narauyaba Sports Ground previously known as Ra Sports Ground.

The HFC Stadium, Mr. Speaker, Sir, continues to be a key premier venue for various sporting events and social gatherings. Currently, the Fiji Sports Council is focused on:

- (1) Upgrading the HFC Stadium with synthetic tracks and this should be completed by early next year. I know a lot of sporting bodies have been wanting to use the National Stadium but the tracks are in a very bad state and we need to work on it now and dependent on the weather, we need to complete this before the start of school next year. As you know our students always look up to their athletics meet.
- (2) The construction of the multistorey complex with indoor food sell courts, it is a joint venture with Unit Trust of Fiji.
- (3) The renovation of National Hockey Centre and the Damodar City Aquatic Centre; works on both projects have been completed and it is now ready to be officially opened.

Additionally, the Fiji Sports Council has put in place the following internal control measures to strengthen accountability and transparency processes in the utilisation of funds:

- (1) Conduct regular boards of survey for outdated equipment;
- (2) Updating current Finance Manuals and Procurement plans; and
- (3) Implementation of new ERP system to reduce manual manipulation with the strict approval processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I respond to the former Minister for Youth and Sports, request, yes, I will be tabling a report later on the contract for the replacement of this synthetic tracks. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the preparation of the Committee Report and not forgetting the former CEO - Ms Litiana Loabuka and her dedicated team for the overall upkeep of the Fiji Sports Council venues in previous years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the establishment of the Fiji Sports Council in 1978, it continues to play an important role in our nation by providing safe and reliable sports facilities, foster and promote

the development of sports and associated educational activities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a former Member of the Committee which deliberated on the Review Annual Report, I wish to speak on one of the findings highlighted by the Committee, that is the non-financially viable of seven venues, namely the Victoria Tennis Courts, the Damodar City Aquatic Centre, National Beach Courts, Veivadravadra Grass Sports Ground, National Sailing Centre and the Lawaqa Park.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee went on to recommend that the Council should build and enhance its participation on public private partnership for proper execution of sporting development projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although this might be an outdated report it is important that the Fiji Sports Council consider the recommendation put forward by the Committee and ensure that it is implemented accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the public private partnership, the private sector institution will involve in financing the Fiji Sports Council venues upfront and in return draw revenues from users of the venues over the cost of the public private partnership contract. To attract the private sector and economic feasibilities assessment must be conducted to determine the cost and projected revenue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Sports Council should also consider engaging local communities by forming some sort of partnership with the Provincial Council, youth groups and sports clubs. This will allow the local community to take ownership and involve in the upkeep of the venues and will reduce the operational cost for this non-financially viable properties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this form of partnership is proven to be successful in most rural schools. Often tournament organisers or sports clubs wishing to host the tournaments, face challenges with the rates when hiring the Fiji Sports Council venues. Perhaps, this type of partnership, local youth groups and sports clubs can contribute towards the general operation of the venues and in return, be granted concessional rates when hiring one of the 7 non-financially viable venues. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I support the motion.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the review of the Sports Council 2017-2018 Annual Report. First of all, I would like to join our honourable Minister for Youth and Sports in wishing our Team Fiji in the bid for gold in the Pacific Games in Honiara. As of now, I think 15 hours ago, we had three silvers and two bronze. Hopefully we will work on getting some more.

The Fiji Sports Council, as we heard, was established in 1978 to encourage and promote the development of sports and recreational activities in Fiji. Just a side comment, we observe how honourable Members on the opposite side all seem to claim that everything in Fiji is their doing. I am not sure if they realise it.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- No.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- How un-Fijian that sounds. In our traditional Fijian way, usually frowned upon when one blows one's own trumpet. Usually, we allow others to give us recognition. I believe it is a universal concept, not only in Fiji, who think like that, it is bad form to be praising ourselves what we achieve. But our honourable colleagues in the Opposition, need to be reminded to tone down on the boastfulness.

Just from this one point, Fiji Sports Council was established in 1978. We see the vast majority, not all of the developments in Fiji had their origin in administrations and governments of the past. It is not a thing to be ashamed of. You did not inherit a blank page. Fiji already had vertical and horizontal infrastructure, complex communication systems, television stations, regional and local universities, technical institutes, home to many regional and international organisations and NGOs, national plans to keep improving

HON. K.K. LAL.- Speak on the report.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- It is the way of the world that we live in. We do what we can and we hand it over to those who carry on the race. When the time comes for us to do the same, we will hand over as well. We will let history judge us, therefore, what your protestations and claims, however loud, history will be our judge. It is futile to try and change that for as many teachers that have counselled their students, you will write your own report and for 16 years, you wrote your own report. That is why you are sitting on that side, and we are on this side.

We have no problems nor difficulty in acknowledging your government's developments that are worth your praise. But I ask this question in this august House, have you ever heard them acknowledge the previous administrations or governments? All I heard was unprecedented this, unprecedented that. Unfortunately, it is beyond the former government to thank anyone, it is not in their DNA.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, about two weeks ago the senior officials in our Ministry and I had a meeting with the Fiji Rugby Union where we discussed potential areas of collaboration. We discussed piggybacking on some of FRUs rugby development programmes as well as expertise in providing a network of administrators and officials at provincial, district and village level to support clubs, district teams as well as provincial teams.

From the rural and maritime development point of view, this would help alleviate the rural-urban drift, provide training opportunities, help reduce NCDs, help with socio-economic development as well as provide career opportunities for some in professional rugby or netball. In the same way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that all sports have enormous potential to help in rural and national development, and I believe that the discussions that we had with FRU could also be something that we and other Ministries could be having with Fiji Sports Commission and those in the same field seeing that the Fiji Sports Council is responsible for all the planning, constructing, maintaining and delivering high quality values and activities for sports at all levels for high performance athletes to community recreational activities. As we go around Fiji, we see the deplorable state of some of our grounds in smaller communities and smaller towns, so it is something that is going to be challenging us and I suppose the challenge also for the Fiji Sports Council on what they can do.

I congratulate the board and management of the Fiji Sports Council and wish them well for the future. I endorse, support, and commend the report.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the honourable Members for their comments and constructive and some destructive contributions.

(Chorus of interjections)

Mr Speaker, I hope that in the near future, the Fiji National Sports Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports will consider and assist in the building of a bigger sporting complex in Ra so in time

we can also host some super 14 rugby matches. I have no further comments, Mr Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today and once again, I thank you all for your contributions.

The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.57 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 180/2023 tabled on Wednesday, 22nd November, 2023, by the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport (Ref. Page 2141)



**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS AND METEOROLOGICAL
SERVICES AND TRANSPORT
(Honourable Ro F.Q. Tuisawau)**

Response to the Question by honourable N.T. Tuinaceva is as follows:

- (1) Number of Traffic Infringement Notices were issued within the last 10 months to PSV related offences

Response: The LTA has issued 36,563 TINs to PSV related offences in the last 10 months.

- (2) Number of PSV Driver License were placed on warning, final warning, suspended or cancelled because of being habitual offenders within the last 10 months.

Response: The number of PSV Drivers placed on warning within the last 10 months is 471. The number of PSV Drivers issued final warnings within the last 10 months is 11. The number of PSV Drivers suspended within the last 10 months is 7. The number of PSV Drivers with cancelled licenses within the last 10 months is 5.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 181/2023 tabled on Wednesday, 22nd November, 2023 by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 2141)



MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATERSWAYS
(Honourable V.T.T. K. Rayalu)

Response to the Question by honourable I.S. Vanawalu is as follows:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways constructs farm roads primarily to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the rural farmers through provision of necessary infrastructure and resources that will equip them to enhance their production to meet local and market demand.

The strategic intention of this program not only explores available market opportunities but establishes a workable framework for the efficient and effective participation of all players in the supply chain.

The programme aims to:

- (a) establish and expand commercial ventures with adequate resources and support;
- (b) develop efficient and effective strategies for the entire supply chain, from production to marketing;
- (c) promote key commodities such as yaqona, ginger and turmeric; and
- (d) develop rural areas through an integrated approach.

A total of 157 farm roads were constructed and completed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways in the past eight years, that is, from 2014 to 2022. This was through the provision and facilitation of the following programmes:

- (a) Rural and Outer Island Programme
- (b) Farm Access Programme
- (c) Cocoa Farming Programme
- (d) Nadarivatu Farming Programme
- (e) Flatland Development Programme

Table 1 below shows the number of farm roads completed by Division and Province from 2014 to 2022.

Table 1:

Division	Province	No. of Farm Roads
Central	Naitasiri	20
	Rewa	4
	Tailevu	20
	Serua/Namosi	7
Eastern	Kadavu	6
Northern	Bua	16

	Cakaudrove	24
	Macuata	15
Western	Ba	18
	Nadroga/Navosa	16
	Ra	11
Total		157

In the last financial year (2022-2023), the Ministry upgraded 32 existing farm roads. In this financial year (2023-2024), the Ministry intends to construct 2 new and upgrade 167 existing farm roads with a budget allocation of FJ\$2 million to enhance food and income security and exports.

Table 2 below shows the number of farm roads the Ministry is planning to construct this financial year.

Table 2:

Division	Province	No. of Farm Roads
Central	Naitasiri	16
	Rewa	6
	Tailevu	38
	Serua/Namosi	10
Eastern	Lau	10
	Lomaiviti	12
	Kadavu	6
	Bua	2
Northern	Cakaudrove	8
	Macuata	3
	Ba	22
	Nadroga/Navosa	18
Western	Ra	18
Total		169

In conclusion, this programme has cross-cutting positive outputs of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), National Development Plan (NDP), Ministry of Agriculture Strategic Development Plan (SDP) and Ministry's Costed Operational Plan (COP). The development of new farm roads and improving the existing ones will not only connect farming areas to markets but also improve farmers' livelihoods and grow Fiji's Agriculture Sector.