

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 4TH MARCH, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 4TH MARCH, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.55 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection

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

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

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration

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

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

Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports

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

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

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

Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry

Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs

Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education

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

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

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

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

Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Assistant Minister for Finance

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

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

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodoro

Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu

Hon. Jone Usamate

Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya

Hon. Premila Devi Kumar

Hon. Viliame Naupoto

Hon. Ioane Naivalurua

Hon. Mosese Drecala Bultavu
Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Aliko Bia
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Ratu Josai Bulavakarua Niudamu
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Shalen Kumar
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Sachida Nand

Absent

Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's Official Opening of the second session of this parliamentary term. I also welcome our guests seated in the gallery, thank you for joining us today.

Today is another special occasion in the parliamentary calendar, as it marks the Official Opening of the Second Session of the third term of the Fijian Parliament. The State Opening will be officiated by His Excellency the President, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere.

Refurbishment - Parliament Chamber

Honourable Members, as you may have seen today the Parliament Chambers has undergone some refurbishments and IT conferencing system upgrade to ensure that Parliament remains adaptable to the ever-changing world of technology. There has been a change in the carpet colour to the two-tone navy blue and grey. The colour is considered timeless in fashion and design, and it represents wisdom, stability, trust, convention and knowledge that stems from within us. It also resonates and represents the vast "blue" Pacific Ocean that surrounds Fiji. It is hoped that it would provide the platform that can be used for cooling and calming, both physically and mentally whilst there are heated contributions in debates by both sides of Parliament in respect of building Fiji's democracy.

While Fiji continues to honour the Westminster traditions in terms of practices and aesthetics, we should also appreciate the need for our Parliament to make certain adjustments to branch of on its own. Many Commonwealth Parliament Chambers have adopted colours different from the traditional Westminster green. In this case, while the carpet colour has changed, for the most part, Parliament still uses green in other aspects of this Chamber.

Honourable Members, the other is the inclusion of the crafted tapa or motif design backdrop at the back of my Chair and this is to represent our unique Fijian culture, and also to encourage our talented women entrepreneurs to display their leadership and skill, and for the empowerment of women and partly to promote women handicraft as part of Parliament's contribution to SDG5 on gender equality. This one is a traditional *masi* drapery from Cakaudrove and has been made by the women of the province.

It is also envisaged that the Secretariat, in consultation with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, will also be in touch with the other Provinces, who will also be able to provide a similar motif design to be hung at the back of my chair at a later time so that we may showcase that our cultural identity is very much alive and well. It does not stop other Speakers of Parliament who will occupy this Chair in the future to change the background to one that they identify with, be it from any province or even from other non-iTaukei communities.

We have just come back from a visit to the great Government of Australia by the Parliamentary seat in Canberra. There, they have on display in their big parliamentary Chambers 7,000 work of art from the interior to the coast and to the urban areas. It belongs to the traditional people, the first nation's people, and the Australian people are quite proud for what is showcased in their Parliament. Most of the Parliament elsewhere, even the New South Wales State Parliament has a similar display of art works, and also the Chair. Most of our walls within this Chamber lay bare for all this time, but again, this is a proud place to display our handicrafts, especially coming from the women.

Honourable Members, the other adjustment you may have noticed is the elevated gallery which will provide both our visiting guests a better view by the Speaker. Furthermore, as you can see, we have restored the Presiding Officer's Chair, this is the one that I am sitting on, which is very historic given that it dates back to 1939 with all its original art with the Crown at the top which signifies that Fiji is still a member of the Commonwealth. I am told that the honourable Faiyaz Koya's dad also used it during his tenure as Deputy Speaker. It also has our coat of arms with the inscription, *Rerevaka Na Kalou Ka Doka Na Tui* or translated (Fear God and honour the King), and we will keep all the original handcrafted carving designs on it including the red leather and the cushion.

Finally, honourable Members, you would have noticed the additional five big screens on the walls which will allow Parliament to boost its e-Parliament initiative. We will continue to reduce the use of paper for the printing of Order Papers, Minutes of Proceedings and other documents. All these documents will be emailed to all honourable Members and copies will be projected from these screens.

Honourable Members, and at this juncture, I wish to advise that as is customary, the honourable Members of the Judiciary will be joining us in Chamber to hear the Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji.

[Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament escorts the honourable Members of the Judiciary into Parliament while honourable Members of Parliament are upstanding.]

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament and Secretary-General to Parliament retire from the Chamber to meet His Excellency the President and escort him into the Chamber]

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Acting Chief Justice and honourable Members of the Judiciary, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, High Commissioners, Ambassadors, Members of the Diplomatic Corp, Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen - *mia'u sa bula re* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, please, allow me to acknowledge and greet our countrymen and friends joining us this morning via television, live streaming and *Walesi* platform or radio. I acknowledge your keen interest in the State Opening of our Parliament. It is an honour for me to be here today to open this Parliamentary Session.

As I look upon honourable Members of this august Parliament, I am humbly reminded of the immense responsibility that comes with representing the diverse voices and aspirations of our people. As democratically elected representatives, I ask that you listen to the voices of our people, not only to those who elected you, but to all citizens, young and old, men and women.

I urge you all to faithfully embrace with resolve the principles of democracy and humanity as enshrined in our Constitution. In doing so, we will continue to respect the integrity and dignity of our Parliament. We must acknowledge and recognise our differences; however, we must be united with one common goal to ensure that we live in a progressive and prosperous nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, it is my solemn duty to announce the Government's proposed legislative agenda, policies and programmes as stipulated under Section 81(4) of the Constitution for this term of Parliament.

At the outset, I humbly seek your indulgence to allow me to make a few remarks which I believe are pertinent to the continued progress and prosperity of our people and the nation as a whole.

I spent several happy years of my youth in Macuata with Indo-Fijian farming families during sugarcane harvesting season. Our integrated community in Macuata taught me many important lessons in life which included hard work, respect for our elders, family unity and respect for other ethnic communities.

The two major ethnic communities in Fiji have always lived in harmony together. It is, however, unfortunate that some unscrupulous politicians continue to instigate mistrust among our communities for their own political ends. This has led to the perception of communal differences within our society.

Honourable Members of Parliament, I humbly plead to you all to continue to promote harmony and embrace diversity in our nation.

I would like to remind honourable Members of Parliament the importance of respectful debate as it has an impact on inter-ethnic relations in our different communities. As leaders we are required to leave aside our differences for the common good of our people. We must focus on our shared destiny and commonality rather than our small differences. I sincerely believe that we can all adhere to these fundamentals, to me that is what true leadership is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, I always believe that financial literacy will empower our people with financial security and self-reliance.

Encouraging a culture of financial responsibility can have a positive impact on national prosperity and a secure future.

By providing access to comprehensive financial literacy supported with the enabling environment and necessary financial resources, we can all make informed decisions about saving, investing and managing our resources effectively. For example, I would like to see Jone, who is a dalo farmer and Ram who sells sweets at his cart, learn how to manage and have access to finance. At the same time, encourage a culture of saving which will allow the development of a sustainable investment plan for their families long term security. I would like to see members of our communities learning and sharing from each other's expertise so we can all prosper together.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and Distinguished Dignitaries, I would now like to take this opportunity to expand on the Coalition Government's Progressive Agenda and Legislative Programme. A major priority for the Coalition Government this year is the formulation of a new National Development Plan that will set our collective vision and key initiatives and programmes that will allow the nation to grow sustainably in the short and medium term.

The key fundamental of Government's Development Agenda is inclusive development, to improve the wellbeing of our citizens. Nationwide consultations are currently underway, and I am encouraged by the participation from our communities. It is anticipated that the Plan will be finalised in June this year before the Budget announcement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and Distinguished Dignitaries, our domestic economy will surely return to the pre-pandemic level based on the latest statistics available. As such, a broad-based growth of 3.8 percent and 3 percent is anticipated for the 2024-2025 respectively. Today, our debt is around \$9.9 billion, equivalent to 75.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product, which is unsustainable for a small vulnerable country like ours.

Despite Government's emphasis on fiscal and debt sustainability, the new global risks and existing challenges linked to climate change present significant potential risk to the medium-term and micro economic forecast.

The Government is committed to strike a balance between rebuilding fiscal buffers and promoting growth by allocating sufficient resources to key priority sectors particularly the resource-based sectors. This means investing in robust, resilient infrastructure and enhancing social safety nets for the disadvantaged and low-income households.

Accelerating key structural reforms enhancing efficiency in public service delivery by reducing wastage and executing public and private sector initiatives to foster growth in the short term will be a priority.

To strengthen public finance, the Financial Management Act and related laws, regulations, instructions are being reviewed to enhance transparency, accountability and fiscal discipline.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, with regard to our Foreign Policy, the Government will continue to pursue Fiji's interest under the three key pillars which include sovereignty, security and prosperity. With strong multilateral and bilateral ties, we have restored the confidence of our development partners, improved cooperation and strengthened our foreign policy motto of being friends to all and enemies to none.

Government, for the first time is formulating a White Paper on our Foreign Policy. The Paper will project Fiji to the world; elaborate on our identity, our values and approach to diplomacy.

The current global geo-political tensions, wars in Ukraine and the Middle East and more than 30 other armed confrontations around the world have created more uncertainty and fear, particularly in the global trading environment due to disruptions in the supply chain. We are in a menacing moment of history. Therefore, it is critical that we must continue to promote peaceful solutions.

Peace creates communities of compassion, care and charity and leads to prosperity and development. This has given the opportunity to promote the concept of the Ocean of Peace for our Blue Pacific - custodians of a powerful symbol of co-existence and friendship. Our honourable Prime Minister will continue to champion the concept of the Ocean of Peace in the region and in the international arena.

The Ocean of Peace concept is designed to help move Pacific Island Member Nations to the next level of cohesiveness, prosperity, security and influence while enhancing and not reducing each State's full sovereign rights. It is anticipated that the Ocean of Peace concept, once accepted and embraced by all Pacific Island Member States would effectively create a 32 million square kilometres of Member States' territorial waters as a major geo-political bloc which will enhance the Pacific's position in the global scene. It will also enhance the protection of each State's natural resources, maritime and other natural heritage and the unique and diverse culture, language and beliefs of each member state.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, the Coalition Government is committed to protect and preserve our traditions, cultures and languages to promote social cohesion among our people. To accomplish this, the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs will launch a new policy framework that will enhance social cohesion among all ethnic communities through sound policies, consultations and inclusiveness.

The Government is working with our development partners in exploring options for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to heal the pain and scars left by the events of 1987, 2000 and 2006.

To revitalise the sugar industry, a number of initiatives have been developed to increase cane production to 1.8 million tonnes in the 2024 season compared to the 1.6 million tonnes in 2022. To support diversification within the industry, alternative livelihood programmes will be developed to augment farmers' incomes against world market price fluctuations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, we, like other countries in the Pacific, directly bear the brunt of climate change on our coastlines, communities, livelihoods and security. This is despite the fact that our contribution to global emission is negligible.

The unjust burden placed on Pacific Island countries requires urgent action to address this very threat to our very survival and identity. Therefore, we must increase our collective effort in implementing climate mitigation and adaptation strategies to minimise the risk associated with climate change and sea level rise not only here at home but also as a region.

In the spirit of international agreement and conventions, Government will continue to implement policies to:

- 1) reduce emissions and dependence on fossil fuels;
- 2) protect our people from climate and disaster impacts; and
- 3) support the wellbeing, resilience and sustainable development of our communities.

Effective collaboration among all stakeholders viz-a-viz Government, Private Sector, Development Partners and Civil Society is critical to our climate change response. We cannot do it alone, we must all work together. Accelerating this response will require strong partnership and access to climate financing.

The relocation of the people of Nabavatu to their new village site at Nadoiviri will commence this year. They were forced to leave their original site in 2021 after *Tropical Cyclone Ana* which caused a geohazard event. The relocation is funded with \$5.9 million from the Climate Change Relocation Trust Fund with support from development partners and Civil Society Organisations.

In addition, Government is mindful of the need to relocate an additional 44 communities affected by climate change around the country. Processes are in place in the preparation of a robust policy framework to support the existing SOP for Planned Relocations. Lessons learnt from previous experience will be the basis of the policy framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, Government is committed to greater accountability, transparency and good governance practices in all Public Sector Entities, including Public Enterprise.

The re-establishment of the Higher Salaries Commission has resulted in an independent and transparent approach in the determination of remuneration relating to top Executive positions in the public sector.

Government will continue to improve collaboration and efficiency in the Civil Service. I am pleased to announce that Civil Service Day will return this year on 28th June to celebrate the contribution of civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, with regards to our tourism sector, it is encouraging to note that visitor arrivals have surpassed pre-COVID-19 figures. By the end of 2024, we anticipate welcoming one million visitors for the first time.

Tourism is a key driver of our economy. A high number of visitors means increased demand for the necessary support services that will be required to support the influx of arrivals.

Government will implement a 10-year strategy for the industry through the National Sustainable Trust Tourism Framework, which will position Fiji in the global travel and tourism market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, education will continue to be a priority. The implementation of the Education Summit outcomes outlined in the *Denarau Declaration*, will be pursued. This includes the review and modernisation of the Education Act and relevant laws, policies and programmes. The formulation of the new Sector Strategic Plan for the next 10 years is aligned to the needs of the labour market and will also address the issue of labour mobility. An Education Commission will be appointed to undertake a holistic review of our education system, so that it is adequately aligned to our needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, Government is committed to expanding Fiji's trade by broadening export with our trading partners. The Government will continue to support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and co-operatives by enhancing regulatory compliance, access to markets and sustainable finance. Most importantly,

the Government will continue to promote value addition in our resource-based sectors to allow the effective participation of our resource owners.

Government is also committed to digital transformation with initiatives such as the National Digital Strategy and the National Cybersecurity Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, Government is committed to implementing the National Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment.

Gender responsive budgeting across all sectors will be implemented this year.

The Child Justice Bill and Childcare and Protection Bill to modernise and strengthen the legislative framework for children will be a priority this year.

Government will continue to enhance social protection programmes, complemented with coverage for climate and disaster shock through the adaptive Social Protection Framework.

As announced last year, the National Defence Review is ongoing to address the changing security landscape. The recent seizure of approximately four tonnes of methamphetamine requires the review of the Illicit Drugs Control Act and related legislation.

The Police Force will collaborate with counterparts in source countries to curb the smuggling and transshipment of illicit drugs to and through Fiji. Partnerships with religious bodies, traditional and community leaders and other stakeholders are crucial in the fight against crime and drug trafficking.

The review of the Defence, Immigration and National Security legislation will be given priority.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, in our health sector, Government is committed to addressing the significant challenges posed by the burden of Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases, which impose a substantial burden on our population and the economy.

Our health strategies and programmes will be directed to ensure effective delivery in revamping health programmes relating to:

- 1) Child and Adolescent Health;
- 2) Immunisation and Early Childhood Development;
- 3) Sexual and Reproductive Health including HIV and AIDS;
- 4) Maternal Reproductive Health; and
- 5) Cancer Prevention.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and Distinguished Dignitaries, the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) has been re-established under the iTaukei Affairs Act. The successful meeting last week saw the appointment of members of the Council, the Chairman and two Deputies to lead the Council. The Council will now examine the final report of the GCC Review Team, which made various recommendations to ensure the independence and the new structure of the Council. Most importantly, to ensure political neutrality.

I am pleased to note that after the extensive consultation process, the Bill on Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture will be tabled in Parliament later this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, Government will review the State Lands Act and related legislation to streamline procedures and further improve revenue collection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished Dignitaries, water is a basic need and crucial for our socio-economic development. Our water and sanitation infrastructure requires long-term planning.

The Water Sector 2050 Strategy outlines necessary investment and enhancement initiatives in the Water and Wastewater Sector. The Government is committed to ensure that all our citizens have access to clean drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, Government is committed to revitalising the ship building industry with construction of a new facility in Lautoka that will be able to serve both, domestic and foreign-going vessels. This will be achieved through Public and Private Partnership and support from development partners.

The review of the Maritime Transport Act 2013 is intended to align with international standards and promote a safe and sustainable maritime transport sector.

The National Energy Policy 2023-2030 underpins Government's commitment to a resilient, cost-effective and sustainable energy sector. The objective is to achieve universal access to electricity by 2026, reduce greenhouse gas emission by 30 percent by 2030, and transitional fully to renewable energy by 2036.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, agriculture will continue to be the backbone of our economy and for food security and export.

The Government is committed to provide every citizen access to adequate, safe and nutritious food, whilst fostering a competitive and sustainable agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of the Parliament, distinguished Dignitaries, associated with the development of agriculture and other resource-based sectors, rural development is a key national priority. Government will implement a wide range of socio-economic activities to support the goal of growing the rural economy and raising the standard of living for our rural communities.

The Government will prioritise a wide range of programmes to revitalise the rural economy and encourage self-reliance, include funding for:

- 1) Self-Help Programmes;
- 2) Community Access Roads;
- 3) Footpaths and Footbridges;
- 4) High Risk Water and Sanitation Projects;
- 5) Rural Housing Assistance Programme; and the
- 6) Rural Outer Island Development Programme, including improved shipping services.

A new Disaster Risk Management Bill to replace the Natural Disaster Management Act has been approved by Cabinet and will be tabled in Parliament later this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, I am pleased to note that a tripartite labour fora has been re-established with representation from workers, Trade Unions and Government, working together to address issues relating to our labour force. This fora will play a pivotal role on issues relating to employment, productivity, workplace relations and the National Minimum Wage.

The Employment Relations Act and its subsidiary legislation is also being reviewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, there are numerous challenges in developing the fisheries sector which is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Government will develop strategies and programmes to support responsible fishing practices to meet the growing demand for seafood while sustainably preserving our ocean.

The Fisheries Act 1941 and related legislation is also under review.

In our forest sector, the emphasis will be addressing climate resilience and sustainable forest management. Government will continue with the campaign to plant '30 million Trees in 15 Years' - an initiative started in 2019.

The review of the mahogany industry has been given priority by the Government, and the focus will be on sustainability and value addition to improve foreign exchange earnings and enhance the participation of resource owners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, Government will work with the private sector and stakeholders to:

- 1) develop public housing infrastructure;
- 2) improve access to finance; and
- 3) encourage construction of climate resilience and energy-efficient homes.

The Government will continue to regularise informal settlements to ensure security of tenure.

The revitalisation of municipal markets will be a conduit for the growth of economic activities and special attention will be given for further improvement.

Government is committed to empowering ratepayers to elect their own representatives to city and town councils. The review of the Local Government Act and Elections Act is ongoing to facilitate municipal elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament and distinguished dignitaries, as we embark on a new Parliamentary session, I urge you to consider sentiments expressed by your fellow citizens and bring their concerns to this august Parliament.

I challenge our parliamentarians to work across the aisle, find common ground on critical issues facing our nation and put the people first above petty political interest and personal ambition.

Let us not see challenges as mountains, but as common missions to ascend and resolve with open and constructive dialogue, with a view to build social cohesion.

To all our citizens, wherever you are viewing this Address from, I challenge you to stay

Informed about the policies and decisions made by your elected representatives, and to hold them accountable for their actions.

I urge you all citizens to engage in constructive, respectful dialogue, and to seek understanding and common ground in our diverse society. This is a democratic way that we must all value and cherish.

I wish you all great success for this year and now it is my duty and great honour to declare the 2024-2025 Parliamentary Session open.

May God bless us all and may God bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu* and thank you very much.

(Acclamation)

[Mr. Speaker and honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament escorts His Excellency the President out of Parliament]

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 11th March, 2024 at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the second session of the third term of the Fijian Parliament has been officially opened by His Excellency the President. All Parliamentary business including Parliamentary sittings and Parliamentary Standing Committee proceedings on Bills, Motions and Reports will resume. I think I am a bit late in announcing this. Some letters are on my table already from the Standing Committees and they are eager to move on. I take this opportunity to thank you all for your presence on this auspicious occasion, as well as those joining us through the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and the internet.

At the next Parliament Sitting, Parliament will proceed with a motion by the honourable Prime Minister to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Speech. All honourable Members will speak in accordance with the Batting Order that has been circulated.

On that note, I thank honourable Members, and I now invite you all to refreshments which will be served at the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members, Parliament now stands adjourned until Monday, 11th March, 2024 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.13 a.m.