

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 16TH APRIL, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 16TH APRIL, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.45 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable J. Usamate and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 15th April, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

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

PL100 Students – University of the South Pacific

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming another cohort of PL100 students sitting in the public gallery. Welcome, it is good to see you. They are Government and Politics Law students from the University of the South Pacific. Welcome to your Parliament and I hope the proceedings this morning will give you a better idea of how your Parliament works.

Kabara Cricket Team

You might have also noticed some gentlemen in the purple jerseys. I walked in and I thought they were from the Melbourne Storm. They are, in fact, members of the Kabara Cricket Team who are with us in the gallery this morning. *Ni sa bula vinaka saka, malo*, welcome to your Parliament. It is a pleasure to have you join us today.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report – OAG Report on Municipal Councils 2021-2022 Audit Report

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this Report provides the review findings of the Committee on the Report of the Auditor-General for 2021-2022 Audit Report on Municipal

Councils. The Report covers the audit of 13 Financial Statements for 10 Municipalities that include:

1. Nadi;
2. Sigatoka;
3. Tavua;
4. Rakiraki;
5. Levuka;
6. Labasa;
7. Lami;
8. Nausori;
9. Savusavu; and
10. Nasinu.

In the Audit Report, the Committee noted that there are common audit issues raised across the 10 Town Councils, recurring over the years from 2011 to 2021 financial years. The common significant matters which were found within these Councils, include:

- Significant delays in submission of Draft Financial Statements;
- Non-Compliance with the accounting standards;
- Limitation of scope due to insufficient supporting documents;
- Poor records management;
- Poor asset management;
- Lack of documentation;
- Policies and procedures not updated or non-existent;
- Poor collection and recording of municipal rates; and
- Absence of proper reconciliation of cash, debtors, VAT, rates and payroll expenses.

In addition to the above, the Committee also noted some common internal control weaknesses that were identified within these Municipalities, and these are related to:

- Cash and revenue management;
- Journal voucher documentation and reconciliations;
- Procurement of goods and services;
- Payroll control; and
- Management of assets.

In fact, what was clear was that Municipal Councils and the Ministry of Local Government were not serious with the Public Accounts Committee recommendations after it was raised on numerous occasions in Parliament for them to address those recurring audit issues. One can look at the latest three Reports (apart from the one we are presenting today) that were tabled in Parliament and debated, and those are the:

- Review of the Audit Report of Municipal Councils for 2013 tabled in May 2019;
- Review of the Audit Report of Municipal Councils for 2014-2019 tabled in May 2020; and
- Review of the Audit Report of Municipal Councils for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 tabled in August 2022.

On today's Report, madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to highlight that modified audit opinions were issued on six Financial Statements and Disclaimer of Opinion on seven Financial Statements that were audited, which reflected negatively on Municipal Councils' senior staff, the Councils' respective governing bodies (Councils and Administrators), as well as the Ministry of

Local Government staff and Ministers. I am not sure who were the Ministers from that period - 2013 to 2020.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as you are aware, when one talks about modified opinion or qualified opinion, it means that the auditors were unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence on which to base their opinion. When a Disclaimer of Opinion is issued, it means that there is insufficient appropriate audit evidence provided or obtained and there are undetected misstatements which could be both, material and pervasive, on the Financial Statements.

Apart from the poor quality of the Financial Statements, timeliness of financial reporting is a major concern that needs to be addressed by those in charge of the governance of Municipal Councils.

Overall, the Committee is not satisfied with the actions taken by Municipal Councils and the Ministry of Local Government. These reflected badly on the Councils' leadership and the Ministry's monitoring responsibilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these bad reports must stop and apart from the recurring recommendations put forward in this Report, the Committee is making some practical recommendations which we wish to put in place now.

We have briefly shared our intentions with the honourable Minister responsible and the senior staff of the Ministry and all the Councils on the way forward as per our Recommendations No. 12, 13,14, and possibly 15, on the audit issues that were continuously raised by the Office of the Auditor-General as well as the Public Accounts Committee over the years. Those are:

Recommendation No. 12

All the Councils, with the help of the Ministry of Local Government, within the next three months to submit an Action Plan to the Committee and Parliament on the updating of all Financial Accounts and clearance of all unsubstantiated balances, as well as identifying and resolving all audit issues raised from 2013 to 2018. The Action Plan should include recommendations and implementations of verifications and finally, any recommendation for write-off.

Recommendation No. 13

Subsequently within the next 6 months, we hope can be done by January 2025, after the submission of the Action Plan, as stated in our recommendation 12, all actions must be implemented in the 2025 financial period. Hence, the 2024 accounts should be the last that face a delay and/or contain an audit issue that may deem the account modified or qualified.

Recommendation No. 14

As with our Recommendations 12 and 13, any write-off and/or adjustment to the account balances should follow the approved laws and guidelines and those are:

- 14.1 pursuant to section 34(1)(a) of the Financial Management Act 2004, which provides for the provision for writing off public money, the authority is with the Minister of Finance to inter alia write off losses in respect of public money and that is after scrutiny and further checking whether we can verify some of those long unsubstantiated credit balances.
- 14.2 Pursuant to subsection 2, the power to write off losses includes the power to abandon or discontinue the recovery of amounts of revenues, debts and overpayments.

- 14.3 The Ministry of Local Government with the councils after making their last attempt to clear the outstanding matters, should write to the Ministry of Finance in line with our recommendations 14.1 and 14.2.
- 14.4 The Ministry to ensure that the uniform internal controls and measures supposedly to be in place with the councils from 2017-2018 be monitored strictly so that the same timely and quality issues will not be repeated and that is reflected through unqualified audits.

Recommendation No. 15

Adequate additional Budget must be set aside for the Office of the Auditor-General to bring the audited accounts up to date, especially up to 2024 and also 2025 financial year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with the above specific recommendations as highlighted, we anticipate that all issues will be cleared in the 2025 account.

At this juncture, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the Committee Members, who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan Report, namely, honourable Sakiusa Tubuna (Deputy Chairperson), honourable Jovesa Vocea, honourable Alvick Maharaj and honourable Hem Chand. I also extend my appreciation to honourable Isikeli Tuiwailevu, honourable Aseri Radrodro, honourable Virendra Lal, honourable Taito Matasawalevu and honourable Vijay Nath, who stood in as Alternate Members, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5).

Most importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, in view of the Committee's findings, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that Parliament takes note of the recommendations in this Report.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I now commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

That a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report – Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption 2017-2018 Annual Report

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 38(2) of the Standing Orders of Parliament, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Fiji Independent Commission against Corruption Annual Report 2017-2018 on 27th March, 2023.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Report captures the review findings and recommendations of the Committee with respect to the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) Annual Report.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee noted seven key findings from its review, and these are on the:

1. Rationale on filing a *nolle prosequi* on the matter of certain disposed cases.
2. Involvement of Ministry of Health Officials in corruption-related offences.
3. Selection of communities by FICAC to conduct training sessions on corruption prevention.
4. Effectiveness of the awareness programme undertaken by the FICAC on selected communities.
5. Education level of the National Anti-Corruption Curriculum taught in Schools.
6. Monitoring and Reporting mechanism of FICAC in achieving targets set out in the Sustainable Development Goals.
7. Unclear terms derived on certain expenditures by the Commission as listed under the Financial Statements of its Report.

Madam Deputy Speaker, those were some of the key findings that the Committee had noted from its review and I, therefore, would like to highlight some of the recommendations that the Committee agreed upon, and they are as follows:

1. The Committee recommended that the Commission provides timely submission of its annual reports to Parliament.
2. The Committee recommends that the Commission ensures there is a formal SDG compliant component in all future reports. Furthermore, that the annual peer review report be also in the schedule of all future reports.
3. The Committee recommends that communities such as Rotuma, Rabi, Kioa and Melanesian communities be also visited annually to conduct such trainings, given that these communities are confirmed recipients of project development funds from the Office of the Prime Minister.
4. The Committee recommends that the training information be translated into all vernacular languages in Fiji, and it not be limited to any.
5. The Committee recommends that the anti-corruption education be emphasised at all educational levels, from primary to tertiary, and it to be part of the compulsory curriculum.

Madam Deputy Speaker, those were some of the recommendations that the Committee had sought following its review of the FICAC Annual Report.

In that respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, I commend the Committee's Report on the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report from 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018 to this august Parliament and seek the support of all the honourable Members to take note of the recommendations by the Committee.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

That a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

He may speak up to 20 minutes and after that, I will invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate following that.

I now call upon on the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs to deliver his statement.

Constitutional Offices Commission

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, and I also wish to greet those who are listening in or watching via television, livestream or listening to the radio or Walesi App. I also acknowledge the presence of Law students from the University of the South Pacific and also the newly crowned cricket champion - the Kabara Team. They are very proud to be sitting in the gallery and their self-appointed Manager is the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways.

(Laughter)

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to deliver my Ministerial Statement on the Constitutional Offices Commission (COC) which I Chair and is mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

The COC is established under Section 132(1) of the Constitution of Fiji. The Commission comprises the Prime Minister as the Chairperson, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the honourable Attorney-General, two persons appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, and one person appointed by the President on the advice of the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister's current nominees are Ms. Cema Bolabola and Mr. John Apted. The honourable Leader of the Opposition's nominee is Roko Tupou Draunidalo. The Secretary of the Commission is the Solicitor-General, who is assisted by the Secretariat Team of designated Senior Legal Officers in the Office of the Solicitor-General.

Madam Deputy Speaker, under Section 133 of the Constitution of Fiji, the COC is responsible for providing advice to the President on the appointment of the following Officers, the:

- Chairperson and members of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission;
- Chairperson and the members of the Electoral Commission;
- Supervisor of Elections;
- Secretary-General to Parliament;
- Chairperson and members of the Public Service Commission;
- Commissioner of Police;
- Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service;

- Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces;
- Auditor-General; and
- Governor of the Reserve Bank.

Furthermore, Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Section 138(4) of the Constitution of Fiji, the COC establishes and maintains its own rules and regulations, governing its internal procedures and functions. As such, the COC, for the first time, resolved to consider formulating its own Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with respect to the conduct of its procedures and functions. Following that decision, the first draft of the COC's SOPs were circulated among the members.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for the information of Parliament, COC was allocated \$20,000 for this financial year. At present, the SOPs are being reviewed by the COC members, to ensure that it is comprehensive, it is coherent and compliant with the constitutional provisions and the objectives of COC. The SOPs will serve as a starting point for COC to implement and enforce its functions and responsibilities in alignment with the stipulated sections of the Constitution.

The draft SOPs contain procedures with respect to the quorum for COC meetings, appointment and tenure of COC members, responsibilities of the secretary to the COC, the appointment process for constitutional office holders, dealing with urgent COC matters, decision making processes of COC, the independence of COC and provisions regarding regular updates and advice to Parliament. Once finalised, these SOPs will not only streamline the internal operations of the COC, but it will also provide clarity and guidance to its members regarding their roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, Madam Deputy Speaker, the SOPs will enhance transparency and accountability within the COC, fostering trusts amongst stakeholders and the public of Fiji. It is expected that the finalised SOPs will be officially adopted by the COC following thorough deliberations and consensus building amongst its members. For the benefit of Parliament, under the COC, we have seen the appointment of Mr. Luke Rokovada as the Chairman of the Public Service Commission and Ms. Barbara Malimali as Chairperson of the Electoral Commission. The following substantive offices are currently vacant:

1. Supervisor of Elections;
2. Auditor-General; and
3. Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service.

However, there are existing acting appointments in those offices namely, Ms. Ana Mataiciwa as the Acting Supervisor of Elections; Mr. Sairusi Dukuno as the Acting Auditor-General and Ms. Salote Panapasa as the Acting Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service, all of whom were appointed by His Excellency the President on the advice under my tenure. The recruitment process for these substantive officers is underway and the COC intends to deliberate on the suitable candidates for the appointment in its next meeting later this month.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for the first time ever, the COC established an Independent Committee to advise the COC on the appropriate remunerations and allowances that should be payable to all constitutional officers under its responsibility as referred to earlier. The Independent Committee consists of Mr. Cama Raimuria as Chairperson, Ms. Salote Uluinaceva and Ms. Elenoa Biukoto.

The remuneration and allowances for future appointments, including those for Supervisor of Elections, Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service and Auditor-General will be based on the recommendation of the Independent Committee as mandated by Section 136(2) of the Constitution.

Unfortunately, Madam Deputy Speaker, the previous COC did not adhere to that constitutional requirement, and some of the previous office holder's remunerations or allowances are subject to certain investigations by the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption.

During its meetings on 18th and 26th January of last year, the COC considered serious complaints of abuse of office made against certain former constitutional officers, namely the:

1. Supervisor of Elections - Mr. Mohammed Saneem;
2. Commissioner for Fiji Corrections Service - Mr. Francis Kean; and
3. currently suspended Police Commissioner - Mr. Sitiveni Qiliho.

Those individuals were provided an opportunity to respond to the allegations, following which the COC deliberated on whether, based on the allegations made, the question of their removal ought to be investigated, in which case the COC was required to appoint a tribunal in accordance with Section 137(3)(a) of the Constitution. A tribunal appointed will be required to inquire into the matter and provide its written report to His Excellency the President.

In the case of Mr. Saneem as Supervisor of Elections, the COC received a complaint against Mr. Saneem which had not been dealt with by the former COC members. On 6th January, 2023, this complaint was forwarded to Mr. Saneem to provide any necessary responses before the COC decided on whether to appoint a tribunal to investigate the complaints in accordance with Section 137(4) of the Constitution. Mr. Saneem responded on 9th January, 2023 to those complaints and his responses were brought before the COC.

On 26th January, 2023, the COC after considering the complaints and responses provided by Mr. Saneem agreed to refer the allegations to a tribunal composed of the honourable Justice Filimoni Jitoko as Chairperson, the honourable Justice William Calanchini and the former honourable Judge Jiten Singh. On the advice of the COC, the President suspended Mr. Saneem, pending the referral and appointment of the tribunal. However before the tribunal could conduct its work, Mr. Saneem resigned as Supervisor of Elections, bringing that matter to an end.

In the case of Mr. Kean as Commissioner of Corrections Service, the COC received five complaints against him. On 18th January, 2023, these complaints were forwarded to Mr. Kean to provide the necessary responses before the COC decided on whether to appoint a tribunal to investigate the complaints in accordance with Section 137(4) of the Constitution. Mr. Kean responded on 23rd January, 2023 to those complaints and his responses were brought before the COC. On 26th January, 2023, the COC agreed to refer the complaints of misbehaviour to a tribunal to enquire into the complaints and provide a report to the President. However, Mr. Kean tendered his resignation letter on 14th February, 2023, and therefore there was no need to proceed with the tribunal proceedings.

In the case of Mr. Qiliho, the Commissioner of Police, three separate complaints of misbehaviour were lodged against him. On 26th January, 2023 the COC agreed to refer those complaints of misbehaviour to a tribunal to enquire into the complaints and provide a report to the President. The COC also agreed to recommend the suspension of Mr. Qiliho to the President which is still in place. Overall, ensuring the smooth operations of constitutional offices has been the cornerstone of the COC's work in recent years reflecting its ongoing commitment to efficiency and functionality within this vital institution.

Building on these initiatives on 3rd November, 2023, the COC embarked on laying the ground work for establishing an independent secretariat. The start is pivotal in enhancing the COC's capacity to facilitate its functions effectively, ensuring streamlined processes and better support its functions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in recent weeks complaints against constitutional office holders have been highlighted in various media reports. In accordance with due processes and the rules of natural justice, all complaints against constitutional officers will be dealt with by the Commission. The officers in question will be given the opportunity to respond before the Commission makes any further decision in accordance with the Constitution. I expect an update on these at the upcoming meeting of the COC of the week beginning 29th April, 2024 and thereafter will update Parliament and the people of Fiji on the work of the Commission.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, first of all, let me take this opportunity to say ‘thank you’ to the honourable Prime Minister for delivering this Ministerial Statement on the Constitutional Offices Commission.

As we all know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the COC forms a very critical component as provided for in our Constitution. In the actual Constitution, as spelt out by the honourable Prime Minister, the performance and functions of each of those commissions and tribunals is looked after within Section 138 of the Constitution and it applies to the:

1. Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission;
2. Electoral Commission;
3. Judicial Services Commission;
4. Legal Aid Commission;
5. Mercy Commission;
6. Public Service Disciplinary Tribunal;
7. Accountability and Transparency Commission;
8. Public Service Commission;
9. Constitutional Offices Commission; and
10. any tribunal or medical board established or appointed under this Constitution to consider the question of removal from office of any person.

So, that particular section applies to those bodies and the performance or functions of commissions and tribunals and those particular performances and functions of those tribunals.

What I am referring to honourable Prime Minister, within that particular section, there is a sub-section 3 which reads, and I quote:

“A decision of a commission, tribunal or board to which this section applies requires the concurrence of a majority of its members and the commission, tribunal or board to which this section applies may act despite the absence of a member but, if, in a particular case, a vote is taken to decide a question and the votes cast are equally divided, the person presiding must exercise a casting vote.”

Why I read this, I think this is very applicable to something that you have before you and something that had been floated about in our social media with respect to issues that have been raised by a particular Chairman from them. It is not for us to adjudicate upon it, Sir, it is for the COC to do so. That is a very important provision especially regarding the concurrence of a majority of its members. So, when in receipt of something from one of these chairpersons, we must always ensure that, that letter has come by virtue of concurrence from the actual Commission.

On an overview perspective, obviously, the functions and responsibilities like has been covered, the COC oversees the appointment of quite a number of people and there is a constitutional mandate. Madam Deputy Speaker, most of all, the COC’s mandate is to uphold the Constitution by ensuring that a fair and transparent process is there for appointments for Constitutional Office,

something which the honourable Prime Minister has actually spelt out. We are happy to see that as an SOP currently being worked out with respect to all of those being at the forefront of that particular SOP.

The independence of the COC is critically important to a country like ours because this body encompasses important institutions within Fiji. The independence of the COC and what we must also remember is the transparency issue is critically important also. The transparency and accountability of the Commission itself is important. When you actually sit there whether it be as Chairman or whether it be as a normal member, you actually put a very different hat on because these bodies that you are actually looking after are critical components in the efficient running of a nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have said, the mandate is to uphold the Constitution. There is one issue, what we really want to know is in terms of the development of the SOP, honourable Prime Minister, what is actually being followed or who are we looking at? What are the guidelines that have been given regarding this SOP? Who was it been given by? Is it being a transparent process where we are looking at, even with a SOP, although it is a self-governing issue, you are allowed to within the constitution, it is important that the public actually knows, apart from the people who are involved in the development of the SOP, is it the independent institutions that have been allowed to be a party to and privy to the development of that SOP?

We commend the Government with respect to its strong commitment to the COC, as I have said, it forms a critical component for all of us and we believe that by addressing head-on the recent concerns as alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister, we are actually fostering a culture of transparency. I commend the honourable Prime Minister's move to actually ensure that all of that is done.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I see the time is around 10.26 a.m. and I will be adjourning Parliament for morning tea. I trust that the speakers in the morning tea room in the Big Committee Room have been fixed so at least the volume turned up so we do not miss the bell like most of us did yesterday morning. Thank you, honourable Members, enjoy your morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.26 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming another group of law students from the University of the South Pacific. Welcome to your Parliament, ladies and gentlemen. I hope that you will learn a few aspects this morning of how your Parliament works.

QUESTIONS

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, please, take note that I have allowed Question No. 13/2024 to be asked later on as the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection has to attend an official event at this point in time. When she enters, we will allow that question to be asked of her.

Oral Questions

Development of Yawe to Lomati Road – Status & Plan (Question No. 11/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament of the status and plan to complete the road that was initially developed to connect the southern end of Kadavu from Yawe to Lomati and to Daviqele?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to respond to the question raised by the honourable Member regarding the road connection from Yawe, Lomati and Daviqele on the southern end of Kadavu.

This road project through the Fiji Roads Authority actually started in 2017 which involved the construction of a new 4.7 kilometre road along the Yawe District from Nakorovou to Naqalotu. This was completed in 2021 despite the effects of COVID-19 disruptions which had impacted on the logistics and schedules including movement of contractors, labour and material supply. The contract was awarded to Prem Civil Engineering Limited to upgrade the existing 9.7 kilometres road from Vunisea to Nabukelevu-i- Ra and the further construction of a new 4.7 kilometre road along the Yawe District for a total value of \$5.3 million.

The Government through the FRA is planning to progress with this new road development in the next phase from Naqalotu to Lomati which is approximately eight kilometres in length. Following this phase will be the road connecting from Lomati on the east coast to Daviqele on the south coast with additional 3.5 kilometres. These proposed rural developments are part of the current FRA Plan Scope which will involve investigation and detailed design of the new road alignment, the necessary details of works will include topographical survey and environmental and social safeguards including community consultations, geo-technical investigation and necessary costing of the whole construction works. These planned requisite activities are envisaged to commence in the next financial year.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Do you have a supplementary question, honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the question to the honourable Minister is, have you been to this place? You will need to understand the problems and the difficulties that

these people face. Kadavu is well-known for drug cultivation, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have issues on access, particularly the *vanua* because *Tikina* Nabukelevu is divided because of the villages that are on the other side.

This project was between rural development, they were undertaking the road from the Daviqele side (from Nabale). They were already pursuing that. Forestry was already doing some logging in the area, they were doing some work in that as well. So, it is bringing the stakeholders together and sharing the cost because rural roads is about access, not so much about standards. Have you been there, honourable Minister, and hopefully you can have a better understanding of this?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, I note the request from the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- So, have you been there, honourable Minister?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, but we are planning to visit; it is part of the plan.

(Chorus of interjections)

MOU - Australia and Port Infrastructure Services
(Question No. 12/2024)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Australia and Port Infrastructure Services.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, most Members would be aware that the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Port Infrastructure and Services comes under the umbrella of the elevated *Vuvale* Partnership which was a great initiative continued by the FijiFirst Government and we have decided to continue with that. We signed the elevated part of it in October last year. It was signed between the Prime Minister of Australia, honourable Anthony Albanese and I.

You may also recall, Madam Deputy Speaker that the *Vuvale* Partnership articulates our joint development priorities. The priorities are encapsulated under five pillars and they include:

- Strengthening our people-to-people links;
- Enhancing our security cooperation;
- Deepening our economic relationship;
- Regional international cooperation; and
- Fostering closer institutional linkages in support of strong inclusive societies.

In December of last year, our joint teams (the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Australian High Commission) agreed on a range of development priorities to be considered under the umbrella of the *Vuvale* Partnership which includes support in the development of our port facilities and service sector.

The development and management of key infrastructure, in particular Fiji ports, is of utmost importance in light of the broader implications on connectivity, security and prosperity and is

therefore considered central to Fiji's sovereignty. The MOU also implements the People's Coalition Government's commitment to revive the shipbuilding industry which also includes include shipwreck and maintenance. That is to support my vision for Fiji to become the hub of the Pacific as the major port of entry, transshipment port and provide services to the Pacific fishing fleets.

In light of the ongoing geo-political competitions, the upgrading of our ports is in line with the Zone of Peace concept that we had proposed as a vision for the region. Earlier this year in March, Cabinet agreed to the proposed MOU on port infrastructure services which was to have been signed on 16th March, 2024 in Lautoka but because of the flooding we were experiencing here in Fiji, at the last moment, the Australian Team decided to give us time to recover and later on come. They were supposed to have come this week but as I have mentioned this morning, the mother of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Honourable Penny Wong, died yesterday so she could not come for that reason.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the MOU outlines the framework for the preparation of proposed life investments into Fiji's Port infrastructure and services as managed by the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL). The FPCL manages the Ports of Suva, Lautoka, Levuka, Vuda, Malau, Rotuma and Wairiki.

The MOU falls under the Australian Infrastructure Funding Facility (AIFF). The development of Fiji Ports will provide the necessary impetus to strengthen the local shipbuilding industry. Due consideration will also be given to skills development, with the aim to see benefits to the local industry.

In the meantime, Madam Deputy Speaker, preparatory work on the feasibility study continues. We are grateful to Australia for its understanding and support and especially, for standing with Fiji in this important infrastructural work. Last month, I was in Perth to receive the Guardian Class Patrol Boat, *RFNS Puamau*, donated by the Australian Government.

Further and as for grant financing, Madam Deputy Speaker, Australia is Fiji's largest development partner, having provided more than AU\$95 million or US\$62 million in ODA in the 2022 to 2023 period. During the period 2019 to 2021, Australia provided US\$306 million to Fiji.

As the maritime State, it is critical that ports and related services are developed to international standards and maintained at that level. We look forward to cooperating with Australia in the development priority, as articulated in our *Vuvale* Partnership.

HON. F.S. KOYA- I thank the honourable Prime Minister for his answer. Honourable Prime Minister, as you had rightfully spelt out, we are a hub in the Pacific, and it is a massive opportunity for us. But one of the most critical components with this transshipment hub, et cetera, and Australia has been a party to all of these, is biosecurity. My supplementary question is, has biosecurity formed a big component with respect to the development of our infrastructure because the problematic part with respect to being a transshipment hub, et cetera, has always been biosecurity? I am sure the honourable Minister for Trade would agree with me that it needs to, and seeing that Australia is such a huge trading partner with us and because we are transshipment hub, is biosecurity a component in this particular agreement, Sir?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a very important part of the whole development. Two weeks ago, we had a Biosecurity Workshop in Nadi where this was brought up and discussed very, very seriously by the participants. It was an international participation workshop.

We are very, very mindful, not only of our concern but also the region, particularly in ensuring

that what we get from overseas ports allow for our own participation in the inspections at those ports of departure. Also, we will allow officers from those designation ports to be in Fiji to make sure that those that tranship through Fiji to their country as destination will also participate.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a simple question to the honourable Prime Minister. It is good that he is mentioning about the shipbuilding industry in Fiji and hope that this can be expedited because under the SVT Government, the ship building industry lost its stature in Fiji. So, the simple question is, when will this be reinstated? It is important for us as a maritime nation, the fishing industry has a lot of potential in terms of the services and even the Naval boats. We have been in discussion with Australia if this can be serviced here in Fiji rather than the half-life refit and others to be taken to Australia.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Leader of the Opposition will be surprised at how quickly we are going to bring this. Last week, we had two of our Permanent Secretaries looking at the Bataan Ship building Port and they came back with recommendations which will very soon be discussed in Cabinet.

The last big ship that we built was the 73 metre vessel, *MV Reef Endeavour*, and it was a really good vessel. We would like to use those who had participated in the building of that, while they are still alive and are still capable, and quite a few of them are still there and are capable. They would be among the first to be recruited, as well as those who will be coming through the technical training - thanks to our Ministry of Education and the FNU, et cetera. Yes, I am sure before the end of this year, we will be discussing the implementation of the ship building industry.

Update on the Relocation of Nabavatu Village
(Question No. 14/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the progress of the relocation of Nabavatu Village?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, I thank the honourable Member for this question. Before I provide an update on the Nabavatu Village Relocation Project, let me give you some background.

The Nabavatu Village was critically affected by a geohazard event that shocked the community in January 2021, following *TC Ana*. As we all know, *TC Ana*, although was a Category 2 Cyclone, it happened in less than a month after Category 5 *TC Yasa* that also hit Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the geohazard event in Nabavatu involved a series of land slumps, landslides, tensional cracks and associated ground displacements, which were experienced in the village. The tensional cracks identified at the hillside posed risks to more than 20 buildings, resulting from high rainfall, associated with poor surface drainage.

The rainfall recorded in Dreketi at that time was around 309.5 millimetres, one of the highest rainfalls experienced during *TC Ana*. The amount of precipitation received at that time was a decadal one, one in a 10-year event. Seismic activity with a magnitude of 5.8 megabytes was also experienced. Structural damages such as cracks on walls, floors and pavements, including detachment of concrete slabs, tilting of buildings and movement of building foundations, were evident on standing buildings, including the church.

Madam Deputy Speaker, following the event, taskforces were formed at divisional, district and village levels. The Commissioner for Northern Division was tasked to Chair the Divisional Taskforce, assisted by the Divisional Planning Officer. The District Taskforce was led by the Assistant District Officer Seaqaqa, while the *Turaga Ni Koro* of Nabavatu led the Village Taskforce Team. The reporting line was a top-down and bottom-up approach, to ensure information integrity and accountability.

Madam Deputy Speaker, based on GPS and aerial mapping conducted by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources over the current village site in February 2021, it was revealed that the majority of the dwellings in the village were at high risk. According to a report by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, all buildings and houses located within the medium to high risk zones would need to be relocated as a precautionary measure for the villagers and community's safety. The village, in its present condition, was considered not safe for future habitation, as there remained the risk of reoccurring geohazard event in the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, due to this geohazard event in 2021 and upon the advice from the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, the villagers of Nabavatu had to relocate to the Dreketi Assemblies of God Church compound, which is approximately one kilometre from the village site. The church compound has been the village's temporary relocation site since the geohazard event in early 2021 and I believe most of us have seen the pictures of the tent village and that is exactly where it is.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to state, at the outset, that the Ministry is managing this relocation in alignment with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the Plan Relocation Guideline. This SOP was designed in alignment with the Interagency Standing Committee Framework for durable solutions for internally displaced persons.

The document launched in March 2023, sets out a clear process for the assessment of communities who plan relocation. The SOP has embedded lessons learnt from the previous six relocation projects, to ensure future relocations improve on the gaps identified from previous projects. We thank the previous Administration for a lot of the work that was carried out on this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the SOP streamlines Government's approach, ensuring strengthened coordination of departments involved in the various stages of relocation processes. The SOP also outlines processes for non-government partners to provide support where expertise and resources can be leveraged to assist Government's efforts.

The SOP is guided by the Climate Change Act 2021 and Climate Change Policy 2018-2030 and includes a comprehensive Risk Assessment Methodology to assess and rank the communities, providing justification for selection of a community.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Nabavatu Village relocation is the first in the country to adopt the new SOP on planned relocation.

On progress to date, there are four phases to the project. Phase 1 is civil works which includes road access upgrade, drainage works and land clearing, which is in progress at the site. The Ministry of Public works and the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways are two agencies involved in this activity.

The first payment tranche was released last month through our Climate Change Division, totalling \$244,335.06, and the breakdown are as follows:

- \$191,055 was paid to the Ministry of Public Works; and
- \$53,280 was paid to the Ministry of Waterways.

An expected timeline of completion of Phase 1 is by 17th May, 2024.

Madam Deputy Speaker, scoping is in progress for the connection of service lines through Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) and Water Authority of Fiji (WAF). Once civil works are completed, EFL is to peg and provide quotations. The expected timeline is by 30th April, 2024, for Phase 2.

The WAF quotation stands at \$278,801. Once EFL quotations are obtained, a submission of Waiver of Tender will be submitted to the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics for approval.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Phase 2 and Phase 3 implementation works has been tendered through the Fiji Procurement Office. Tender Reference RFT 49/2024 was advertised on 23rd March, 2024. The 30 days tender, which invites all registered construction companies to bid for the activity as design and bill works for 37 houses, communal septic tanks, footbridge and connecting footpaths.

The tender process are as follows:

1. Site pre-bid meeting will take place on 17th April, 2024, at the relocation site at Nadoiviri.
2. Closing of tender on 27th April, 2024.
3. Tender Evaluation Team to meet and review the tender documents and that will take one to two weeks.
4. Submission of tender to Government Tender Board for approval.
5. Awarding of tender by Government Tender Board in about mid-May.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government and community partnership continues with the provision of timber logging activity to assist the community. The *Mataqali* Uluitoga, with the support of Government agencies in the Northern Division, has made arrangements with Gold Hold Pte Limited to log the timber from their land. This timber will be processed and Gold Hold Pte Limited will reimburse the value of the timber by supplying building materials to affected households. As of now, 207 cubic metres has been logged at the site. Consultation with the other five *mataqali* continues for the proposed logging sites.

Madam Deputy Speaker, discussion is in progress with the re-diversion of initiative above towards the building of the community evacuation centre and community hall.

The Ministry continues to allocate funds for payment of water usage by the community at the temporary relocation site. Payment of water bills from 2022 until today, stands at \$11,385. This will continue until the community are safely moved to the permanent relocation site at Nadoiviri.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry continues to work closely with the community in ensuring that wellbeing and safety is protected.

I must also place on record and thank our partners - the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Live and Learn and Habitat for Humanity, just to name a few, for their unwavering support towards the rehabilitating the Nabavatu community at the current temporary relocation site. The Government continues to engage with our partners for the wellbeing and safety of the Nabavatu villagers.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- We have several Members on the Opposition standing up. Can I just ask honourable Members to, please, keep your questions concise. I know I have been letting you meander around a little bit this morning. I am also getting murmurings from the other side asking, “what’s the question? But I thank you, honourable Members, for the spirit in which you are asking questions today.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, . a very pertinent question with respect to the site that the village has actually been moved to - the permanent site. My question to the honourable Minister is, was there a thorough geotechnical assessment done of that particular site that they are moving to? Is it contained in the SOP for future use with respect to that because we all know the geo surrounding of that area? Was it an independent institution that did the geotech or was it our own Ministry of Lands that did out the geotech assessment?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Yes, there was a very detailed Geo-Tech Survey that was carried out. It was a very thorough one as well. It took much longer than we thought it would take but that is how thorough our Department of Lands had done the work. I believe we only accept work that is done through the Department of Lands as far as our work is concerned.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- We truly sympathise with the community at Nabavatu for what they had to endure during this couple of years.

We thank the honourable Minister for his answer. Initially after *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*, a few members of the Nabuavatu community were reluctant to relocate and land negotiations and other things were going on. I would like to ask the honourable Minister, has that stance changed? Is this relocation going to take the 100 percent relocation of the affected community?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I would like to thank the honourable Member for the question. That was one of the reasons why it took so long. There is quite a bit of disagreement in the community. I think there are only 37 households that are at the present relocation site and those are the 37 households that we are focussing on and that we are intending or planning to move to the new relocation site. But the village site will be prepared for 100 percent of the people when they decide to move over.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Just one final question, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did hear from the honourable Minister that Gold Hold Pte Limited will be involved, so it is just the community contribution that I want to ask of the honourable Minister. Is it cash in kind? To what extend is the contribution from the community when it comes to this relocation?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, what they provided was just the timber which Gold Hold Pte. Limited logged and in return, they would pay for all of the houses that were going to be built. I think there are only about five houses that are involved.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Before I ask honourable Tuinaceva to ask Question No. 15/2024, I would like to acknowledge Professor Jon Fraenkel from the Victoria University, a professor in politics, who is sitting in the public gallery this morning. He is a former university lecturer here at the University of the South Pacific. Welcome, Sir.

Road Upgrade - Valewaqa Settlement, Vunilagi, Cakaudrove
(Question No. 15/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament on when will the upgrade on the road to Valewaqa Settlement in Vunilagi, Cakaudrove, commence so that buses and other light PSVs can start providing services to the residents?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question. Madam Deputy Speaker, please, allow me to provide an update on the Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (CARFF) Development Programme under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the CARFF is part of the programmes that we carry out in the rural areas. It improves community access to the main transportation network, markets and essential services.

For road access, these access roads are not the rural roads used by public transport that are being upgraded by the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA). They are smaller access roads, connecting rural communities including farmers, to Fiji's main centres.

Footpaths and footbridges connect communities for better accessibility and in improving the standard of living. Approximately, \$2 million allocated to the Ministry in the financial year 2023-2024 was for this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the breakdown of the released funds and the number of projects for this financial year per Division are as follows:

1. Commissioner Western Division with 42 projects - \$816,578.
2. Commissioner Northern Division with 23 projects - \$607,164.
3. Commissioner Central Division with 37 projects - \$684,365; and
4. Commissioner Eastern Division with 28 projects - \$498,221.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the funds that are mentioned for the Rural Development Programme is limited to only \$50,000 per project.

For the question, the Valewaqa Settlement at Vunilagi, Cakaudrove, has a total population of 75 with 12 households, a 1.3 kilometre road with iTaukei land ownership. Part of the community that reside at Valewaqa are members of the Melanesian community.

The last road upgrade at Valewaqa Settlement was done by FRA through the Community Access Fund in 2015. The Programme allows FRA to work with the Divisional Commissioner on the community access priority for repair and maintenance. In 2017 the programme was shelved.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the road access is serviceable by RSL and school pick up carriers continue to service the settlement. The road access is earmarked to be upgraded through the Office of the Commissioner Northern under the Community Access Road Programme that I had just described in the next financial year - 2024 – 2025. The Ministry will continue to engage with the community and Fiji Roads Authority through the Community Access Road Programme to enable better access to the community.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.– Madam Deputy Speaker, through you. I just want to thank the honourable Minister for his response. The latest update I received from the Valewaqa community which was last night, even four-wheel drives cannot access the road because of poor road condition. I know the programme the honourable Minister is talking about; it will happen and that takes a bit of

time. People still must walk 1.3 kilometres or 2 kilometres including students to reach the main road to obtain the services. The question to the honourable Minister is, can your Ministry provide some quick fix to enable the movement of vehicles to provide services to the people?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, it is already done. I have already called the Commissioner last night and he is organizing it.

Office of the ICAO Pacific Liaison Officer
(Question No. 16/2024)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Minister and Minister for Education, Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the establishment of the Office of the International Civil Aviation Organisation Pacific Liaison Officer for the Pacific Small Island Developing States.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, since forming the Coalition Government, one of our goals is to bring our Pacific Island communities together which we had witnessed on many occasions including the Pacific Islands Forum Special Leaders Retreat in 2023 by our honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another initiative of strengthening and improving Fiji's relationship with its Pacific Island brothers and sisters in the area of aviation is establishing an office of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) in Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PSIDS are a group of unique islands which share distinct sustainable development challenges characterized by many factors including limited resources, remoteness in terms of distance, poor connectivity, high cost of travel, vulnerability to natural disasters, public health emergencies of international concern and excessive dependence on international support. Most PSIDS do not have the capability to fully discharge their ICAO membership obligations or engage constructively with ICAO on programmes and activities and gain the best possible benefit from their membership. Therefore, an ICAO presence in the Pacific is an essential component of strengthening the relationship between the PSIDS and ICAO.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Cabinet in its meeting held on 9th May, 2023, approved the establishment of the office of ICAO, Pacific Small Island Developing States Liaison Office and the ICAO Pacific Liaison Officer. This is the first ever office of the International Civil Aviation Organization in the Pacific region.

Madam Deputy Speaker, more than 65 percent to 70 percent of all arrivals into Fiji are carried by Fiji Airways. Therefore, our tourism relies on aviation to bring in visitors and aviation relies on tourism to generation demand and fill seats. Given the importance of the role of civil aviation in the Pacific region in supporting the tourism industry as our nation's lifeline, the physical presence of ICAO in Fiji only provides the added benefit to Fiji but also the Pacific region. The ICAO office is set to enhance our status in the global aviation community, creating opportunities for capacity building, skills development and knowledge transfer contributing of the ICAO initiative of no country left behind.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at this juncture, I would like to introduce the ICAO appointed Pacific Liaison Officer, Mr. Shane Sumner, was formally assigned this current position in August 2023 by ICAO. His professional background in aviation is in Air Traffic Management, serving

various roles in Australia as an Air Traffic Controller and in Air Traffic Management. Prio to taking up his role in Fiji, he served as Regional Officer Air Traffic Management in the ICAO Asia Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok. The ICAO Office in Fiji is located at the CAAF compound in Nadi.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since taking up office in Nadi, Shane has physically visited a number of Pacific Island States. Currently, he is coordinating with ICAO and PSIDS for the conduct of Critical Safety Oversight Officer Training to be held in Fiji later this year. The role of Pacific Liaison Officer will be more focussed on supporting improvements in addressing regulatory and technical outcomes and assist PSIDS in addressing their resource and capacity challenge and to enhance communication and coordination with the Pacific Aviation Safety Office, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, UN organisations, Multinational Development Banks and other relevant international regional stakeholders and facilitate technical assistance as required.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the co-ordination and facilitation of ICAO support for the 39th-ICAO member PSIDS which are the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu remain paramount for ICAO Pacific Office.

Madam Deputy Speaker, by establishing a physical presence in Nadi, ICAO aims to facilitate closer collaborations with the PSIDS, providing targeted assistance and expertise to address the unique aviation requirements and the Fiji Government is very proud to be able to have had an active participation in making these facilities.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- We have a follow-up question first of all from the original questioner.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my supplementary question is, when was Fiji aviation last audited by ICAO and what were the results?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the supplementary question. The last ICAO audit of Fiji was carried out in 2019 and we expect the next one in 2025. On the results, Madam Deputy Speaker, Fiji scored 76.3 percent. This sits above the Asia Pacific average of 65.5 percent and global average of 69.4 percent, so Fiji is doing well.

The lower score, Madam Deputy Speaker, was in areas of accident investigation, we need to strengthen that and also the primary and secondary legislations are relating to aviation. The Act to have, Madam Deputy Speaker, goes back to 1976, almost 50 years ago so we need to bring that today and is part of a legislative programme for this year.

Also, the technical qualifications, personal numbers and technical training, we find it very difficult to keep our trained and experienced people in aviation. They are poached. Once they become competent, once they have an added profile, they are poached by our neighbours. It is a huge challenge and is something that will continue to challenge us.

Luckily for last year, we managed to get the full budget required by the aviation, thanks to our honourable Minister of Finance. That was welcomed and will go a long way in strengthening the Civil Aviation Authority in Fiji. At one time, we needed a full complement of 76 staff, we are only sitting at about 65 or so. The audit picks on that, that we are not fully staffed in the right areas. In terms of global rating, Fiji is 11th in the Asia Pacific Region. That is quite significant for our small country and what we do for our neighbours.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my question is related to our representation at

ICAO, and ICAO Conferences has not just been helpful to Fiji, but also to our Pacific Island neighbours and the SIDS that honourable Minister talks about. In terms of the future of civil aviation, at the last Civil Aviation Conference that honourable Gavoka and I attended, one of the key topics was Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF).

My question relates to the fact that by setting up this particular office and having a Liaison Officer, because that was very high on the agenda with respect to civil aviation fuels, and if I may just digress a little bit, Europe has totally gotten behind Africa in terms of sustainable aviation fuels, and the Pacific has been left behind; left behind to the extent that even Australia and New Zealand have been left by the wayside. Will this Liaison Officer have at the top of their agenda our charge with respect to the development of sustainable aviation fuels in Fiji and for the purposes of Pacific and Australia and New Zealand? Is that going to be part of their work?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, SAF is very much part of the requirements of the work of our Liaison Officer and to help develop SAF. I will be making a Ministerial Statement on this on Thursday. Suffice to say that I was happy that honourable Koya accompanied me to Dubai, where I chaired the Conference on Civil Aviation Alternative Fuel.

Maintenance of Cane Access Roads – Ministry of Sugar Industry
(Question No. 17/2024)

HON. J.N. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on how the Ministry is ensuring cane access roads are maintained well before harvesting season.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, unfortunately, honourable Pillay is not here, but, I will give him a copy of my answer as well for his reference. Honourable Pillay has a wide knowledge of the sugar industry given his background as a cane farmer, and I express my gratitude for his insightful question.

(Laughter)

We recognise the critical role of the Ministry is ensuring that the cane access roads needs to be well maintained. These roads, Madam Deputy Speaker, not only transport sugarcane from farms to mills but serves other agricultural farmers and the public as well who are not farmers including linkages through the villages and many informal settlements in the deep interiors of our rural sectors. These roads serve as a vital outreach of our nation's sugar industry enabling timely harvesting and delivery of sugarcane while minimising logistical challenges for our hardworking farmers.

It is important to note, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the maintenance of cane access roads is basically avoided during the rainy season which spans from November to April. This precaution is taken largely to prevent the road upgrades being damaged and washed away by heavy rains and floods which we have just witnessed in January. This strategic decision explains, Madam Deputy Speaker, while repairs of cane access roads have yet to commence too.

To ensure the best value for money, maintenance activities usually begin in May and extend into the early stages of the crushing season. As we prepare for the 2024 harvesting season, Madam Deputy Speaker, preparations are already in the final stages to upgrade 3,000 kilometres of roads and supply of culverts and repair costings with an allocated budget of \$2 million. Since 2012, a total of \$39.4 million has already been expended for this purpose. On average, my Ministry allocates

approximately \$500 per kilometre of the road each year and is often insufficient for the comprehensive maintenance given the impacts of climate change that we are experiencing now.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have progressed very well as my Ministry's workplan, the road contractors for the 2024 maintenance season have been selected through a tender process and every month our accounts are being signed. Maintenance work is scheduled to commence in the first week of May aiming for the completion by the mid harvesting season to minimise stand over cane. As the contractors undertake the essential repairs on the ground, our field staff from the Sugar Cane Growers Council, my Ministry and FSC will actively monitor their progress. Their presence ensures that the quality of work is continuously maintained throughout the duration of the project and as we have clearly defined, specification for the scope of work detailing the right type of material, et cetera to be used. The continued effort between the contractors, farmers and the field staff underscores our commitment to upholding higher standards and delivering effective results in the maintenance of cane access roads.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to add on, I must also inform Parliament that we have successfully completed the In-Field Drainage Project after years of neglect and deterioration which forms part of the foundation of many roads across these farm areas. In tandem with overseeing of the repairs of the cane access roads, this Government is also actively pursuing the restoration of extension of our rail system. Following the extensive discussion during my recent visit to India, we are exploring pathways forward and revitalizing our extensive rail network that holds promise for significant elevation and maintenance workloads. Moreover, I extend to reduce transportation cost for our farmers in enhancing the sugar industry.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in a matter of relevance and accountability, I need to quote this, FBC stated on 31st March, 2023 on cane access road and I quote, "A Minister said, we are focused on bringing in the Ministry of Public Works Department to work on rural infrastructure as said by the Minister for Finance." We noticed the poor and sluggish efforts under the Ministry of Sugar because there were complaints of cane access roads not being attended to.

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

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- I would like to ask the honourable Minister for Sugar, were the promises of the honourable Minister for Finance fulfilled and his instructions obeyed to on how the Public Works Department assisted in the maintenance of cane roads to assist our farmers?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the honourable Member should direct that question directly to the honourable Minister for Finance because he had said it, not me.

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- It is an irrelevant question.

(Laughter)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this is to the honourable Minister, I just heard it from him, improvement of the rail system. You have visited India which is good but when will this improvement take place? I had brought this issue already after visiting Labasa last year, particularly for the farmers from Wainikoro because this is good for the farmers in terms of minimising costs and at the same time, in terms of climate change, reducing our carbon footprints, we need this rail system. When will this rail system be fixed and improved?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I like the honourable Leader of the Opposition, he always says, “when”, but 16 years he was there. That is a fact.

(Laughter)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Answer the question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- When?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Now, let me answer.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Do not shout!

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, yes we visited India, we met this company called RITES. They actually come had and understudied in Fiji earlier and they are coming back to us with an update of the rail system.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- When?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Next year.

Having said that, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is going to happen. There is a team already engaged with us, they should be here in the next couple of months, and it will not take 16 years.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- When?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- 16 years!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, last year we had a real issue in regards to the upgrading of cane access roads, for instance, where the estimate cost to upgrade a cane access road was \$1,000 but few loads of gravel were delivered. I want to ask the honourable Minister whether that trend will continue or the full amount that is allocated is given for upgrade?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think we have made a point that there is a \$2 million allocation for cane access roads and we will make sure that we take care of all the farmers and the roads.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Only one month left, when will you make sure?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You stand up and talk!

(Laughter)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my question to him is, you have got only one month left, we are in the month of April, we have got May, June is the new budget. When are you going to use that money to fix the roads, honourable Minister?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- There was a rainy season in place, it has dried up now.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Do not listen to me then. I have just answered, I think she is day dreaming.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Very poor

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

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I am very sorry, I did not catch half of that, honourable Minister.

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I just mentioned earlier in my reply that there was a rainy season in place, now it has dried up and we will start with the contractors to go on the road.

HON. P. D. KUMAR.- Rain season.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Oh, my god!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- There were four months of rain.

(Laughter)

Update on the Suspension of PALM Registration
(Question No. 18/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations update Parliament on the reason(s) why the PALM registration is being suspended?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, just for the record, our workers were engaged in short-term seasonal work in both, Australia and New Zealand, since 2015. Reforms of the Australian Labor Mobility Programme took place in 2022, resulting in the merging of both the short-term visa of up to nine months and the long-term visa of up to four years. Both Australian programmes are now known as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since the inception of foreign employment opportunities, both Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Work Scheme registrations are done manually by the National Employment Centre (NEC), together with the records of the workers and assessments that are manually recorded and filled with workers passing the assessment criteria, placed into work ready pool – ready for the recruitment and selection process.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the inception of the long-term visa in 2019 opened up more opportunities for Fijians to register their interest for the Scheme and the industry preference that they wish to work for.

With the influx of interest in this PALM Programme, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry, through NEC, has been overwhelmed with the number of registrations in all our seven District Offices around the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it has been noted that registrations increased multiple fold in 2019 to 2023 and is an indication that registered clients are eagerly waiting for the opportunity to be considered to work in Australia.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this long wait has occasionally caused a lot of frustrations amongst clients, resulting in complaints that are escalating to higher authorities even and the Ministry staff had been trying to manage this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just for the record, the numbers registered under the In-Country Recruitment Database is as follows:

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Number Registered	2,922	2,893	6,215	15,091	8,041	35,162

Madam Deputy Speaker, the temporary suspension of Client Registration under the PALM Scheme is for seven months, which commenced from 1st January, 2024, and will conclude on 31st July, 2024.

The updating of the backlog manual registration work is progressing well. The process includes the sorting and cleansing transfer of manual registration into the In-Country Recruitment Database, as well as the process improvement to enhance the efficiency of NEC services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recognising the magnitude of this task, we have engaged volunteers to assist in that critical work. In addition to our volunteers, all our NEC staff in the District Offices have been actively participating in this initiative. Their expertise and understanding had been invaluable in ensuring that the data is accurate and reflective of the current demographics.

We are committed to completing this task efficiently and effectively, and we appreciate the patience and understanding of all during this period. We will continue to provide updates as we move closer to the completion of this project.

As of now, we are processing applications from the year 2021 for all work sectors. The only exception is the aged care where we are currently processing applications from 2022. So, that is the kind of backlog we are faced with, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the Ministry will resume registration from 1st August, 2024.

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- My supplementary question to the honourable Minister, how many workers are currently in Australia and New Zealand at the moment?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I thank the honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs for his supplementary question. As I speak, we have a total of 6,669 Fijians deployed in Australia since 2021. Currently, we have 5,000 who are in Australia. The numbers include the short term and long term employees. Some 700 are currently working in New Zealand and we are expecting another 47 to leave our shores next month.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I thank the honourable Minister for his response. The teething issues that we faced are particularly on worker's rights, labour laws, because there are reports that some of our workers appreciate the scheme, but some of our workers are ill-treated, and that is a

major concern for us. They are seen as, sort of, lower- or second-class workers, as compared to the countries that do receive our labourers. My simple question to the honourable Minister is, what are we doing to address these issues and are our workers fairly represented while they are there in Australia or New Zealand?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. I have alluded to this matter in Parliament in the past. When we came into office, we were criticised for visiting our workers in Australia and New Zealand. Some honourable Members from the Opposition said that we were going on excursion trips.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes we have to deal with the elements as well. When we visited both, Australia and New Zealand, we realised that we did not have any representative of ours who could look after our workers there.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.D. SINGH.- We appointed three Country Liaison Officers, who are now looking after our workers' interests in Australia. I must repeat that in 2021, the Australian Government had already allocated funds for us to appoint a Country Liaison Officer, but we never appointed the officer. But now, we have appointed three of them and the fourth one will be appointed soon. The workers have a direct link to them, they are able to call them any time and they make sure that the minimum standards are observed, equal to those how Australian workers are treated.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have also met with my Australian counterpart and New Zealand counterpart, and we have discussed the minimum standards. The Labour Ministries in both countries have assured us that they are going to make sure that inspections are done, our workers are treated well and that all minimum standards are observed.

Similarly, we have met with the unions in Australia and New Zealand and the respective workers unions have also assured that they will organise them and they will make sure that the minimum standards are met.

Our communities in both Australia and in New Zealand are also assisting us in this matter, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, we have network, we have made sure that our people out there are getting what they rightly deserve as far as treatment by the employers is concerned, and we will continue to do that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think it is a great insult to the staff of NEC because they did very well without these Liaison Officers...

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... and it is unfortunate that the honourable Minister had to make that comment.

Going back to the question, Madam Deputy Speaker, there were some talks that the family members can join the workers. I just want to know how far this has progressed.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the former Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. The records speaks for itself.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative begun last year by the Australian Government whereby some workers' families can join them for the period that they are working out there and the benefit that would be accorded them would be that the spouse would also be allowed to work, and the children would be allowed to receive that education that they deserve. The pilot project begun with Timor-Leste and one other country (Vanuatu, I think) last year and now, it is our turn. We are working closely with the Australian authorities to progress this.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in all his answers, not once has he mentioned that we have a fully-fledged Embassy and a Mission in Australia to take care of a whole lot of stuff that they ought to. It is their job.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- No!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in light of the fact that the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme brings in, if my memory serves me correctly, I think it is about \$39 million a month into Fiji. I am not sure if you have actually answered your question yourself, but the reasons given for suspension really are technical things that you need to do with respect to getting data, et cetera, all those things that you have actually mentioned. Because of the fact that we earned about \$39 million a month, do you not think it was rather a hasty decision to suspend it and the fact that there are a lot of families that are benefiting out of this?

HON. A.D. SINGH- Madam Deputy Speaker, if I understand correctly, I think there is some confusion I would like to clarify. While the registration has been suspended, the sending of the workers has not been suspended, that is continuing.

As I have said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are 35,000 pending applications that we are processing, so the processing is ongoing. As I have stated earlier in my contribution, 47 are leaving in two weeks' time for New Zealand. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Women's Economic Empowerment Plan 2023-2028
(Question No. 13/2024)

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

The honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection informed Parliament on 29th March, 2023 that the Ministry would be rolling out the Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment Plan (2023-2028). Can the honourable Minister update Parliament on how and when the Plan was developed and how well it has been implemented thus far?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the honourable Member for the interest in the Women's Economic Empowerment Plan. Women's Economic Empowerment is essential for sustainable development and inclusive growth. The former President, Barrack Obama stated, "The best judge of whether or not a country is going to develop is how it treats its women."

Global evidence demonstrates that by dismantling social, institutional and structural barriers and challenging gender discriminatory stereotypes and norms, and by fostering women's leadership across all facets of women's lives, we can unlock tremendous economic potential. This includes ensuring women's access to markets, control over productive resources, opportunities for decent work, bodily autonomy and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels.

The upcoming Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (WEENAP), represents the Coalition Government's commitment to unlocking the economic potential of Fijian

women and girls, ensuring their full participation and leadership in our economy. On that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am honoured to give a brief context and update on the WEENAP.

To effectively spearhead the development of this WEENAP, the Ministry took proactive steps since early 2023. On 13th and 14th April, 2023, we organised a high level technical advisory workshop. This event was more than just a meeting. It represented a convergence of minds and efforts, uniting 50 leaders and experts from Civil Society, Government agencies, the private sector, informal sector and Women's Rights Organisations.

This workshop is to foster a collective dialogue through a thorough examination of the economic growth that Fijian women hold within our society, and the barriers they encounter.

We identified a significant burden of unpaid work on Fijian women and girls –

- Their over representation in the informal economy;
- issues of bodily autonomy, with high prevalence of gender-based violence, as well as reproductive cancers;
- limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights;
- daily impacts of the climate crisis;
- limited knowledge access and productive use of digital technology and e-commerce;
- limited access to financial resources; and
- the presence of gender blind policies and discriminatory norms.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Fiji Country Gender Assessment confirms that Fijian women are predominantly employed in low paying jobs, within the precarious informal sector. Only 35.2 percent of women are in formal employment, on a count of less than three interns engaged in paid informal work. This disparity is underscored by the labour force participation rate of 45.5 percent of all women, compared to 82.6 percent of men, revealing a significant gender gap of 38 percent.

Moreover, the challenges extend beyond employment, Madam Deputy Speaker. Nearly two-thirds of Fijian women experience intimate partner violence, with an associated economic cost to our nation of approximately \$400 million annually, that is about 7 percent of our GDP.

In our academic institutions, despite women representing 65 percent of students, as it is evidenced by our students who sit in the gallery today, over half of the graduates face disproportionately high unemployment, particularly among young women aged 15 years to 24 years, where 30 percent are neither in education, neither in employment nor in training. That is, three times the rate of young men.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the MSME sector, which contributes 18 percent of Fiji's GDP, about half the businesses are owned by women. Yet only 19 percent of these enterprises are registered under women's names, and they often operate in low productivity sectors.

In our homes, Fijian girls and women spend two times to three times, the amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work, compared with boys and men.

A significant proportion of Fijian women lack the autonomy to make their own healthcare decisions. Notably, cancers of the reproductive organs, such as cervical and breast cancer, are the leading diseases causing death amongst women of all ages in Fiji, with these cancers being among the top five causes of cancer deaths.

A key point from the workshop I mentioned earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, was that women's control over their bodies is crucial, not just for health, but also for economic empowerment. A healthy woman is a productive woman. Bodily autonomy lets women make important decisions that affect both their personal and work lives. It helps them fully participate in the workforce, start or grow their businesses and reach their economic goals. Therefore, supporting and promoting women's bodily autonomy is vital for them to succeed in all areas of their lives.

I highlight this key data because it powerfully demonstrates the Coalition Government's commitment in taking decisive action in steering a new course. In this context, the Ministry has acted on the outcomes document from the workshop I mentioned earlier, because it underscores the importance of the WEENAP. The Ministry has prioritised its development by mobilising necessary technical resources for further consultation and development.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Ministerial statement!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You asked for a statement and answer, I have 20 minutes to respond. Thank you, honourable Kumar. I would hope you would be supportive of what I am talking about.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We extend our deep appreciation to the Government of Australia for their generous support in moving forward.

The Cabinet has endorsed the implementation of the WEENAP. Following this endorsement in February this year, we assembled the team of experts to drive this initiative forward. The Department of Women is expanded to include a National Coordinator for the WEENAP, a consultant for the WEENAP, who collaborates closely with our WEE Desk at the Ministry and also our Gender Advisor.

Chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, the secretariat includes key society organisations, like the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), DIVA for Equality, the Women's Entrepreneurship Business Council (WEBC) and the Fiji Women's Fund (FWF). We also have representatives from the private sector, like Asian Development Bank (ADB). The secretariat is mandated to provide technical oversight for the consultation and development process of the WEENAP.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that we have developed a robust consultation framework for the WEENAP. This consultation phase is set to commence in May, next month, and will run until the end of July. This consultation aims to alleviate awareness of the importance of women's economic empowerment, spotlighting the significant contributions of women and addressing the challenges that hinder their full participation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are approximately 104 stakeholders in this process, who are directly or indirectly contributing to the consultation of the WEENAP, and these stakeholders are categorised into nine categories.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Ministerial Statement!

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What was the question, honourable Kumar? The question was to give an update on the development of the WEENAP.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- *Vinaka!*

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- These stakeholders from the nine categories include:

1. educational institutions;
2. WEE programmes and projects;
3. development agencies;
4. private sector;
5. financial institutions;
6. networks and associations;
7. civil society;
8. faith-based and women's rights organisations;
9. Government agencies;
10. informal sector; etc.

I shall highlight to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in the consultation process, we continue to lean on the expertise of women-led civil society organisations and the engagement of NGOs - something that the former Government failed many times, to engage civil society organisations in the development of any Government policy.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is bullying.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, a final report will be scheduled for August this year (2024), and also upon completion of this consultation, we will be drafting the Women's Economic Empowerment Plan. This document is expected to undergo validation by the taskforce in September this year and, of course, will be submitted to Cabinet for approval, with the launch planned, hopefully, at the end of this year or early next year.

On that note also, I wish to report to this Parliament that the Ministry is working with the Ministry of Finance and commencing the design of the second phase of the Gender Transformative Capacity Development and Gender Responsive Budgeting. Why is this important to highlight? Because for the first time ever in the history of Fiji under the Coalition Government, we have achieved Gender Responsive Budgeting. We may have little representation in Parliament, but we certainly are results oriented.

For the first time in last year's budget, there were actual budget allocations in Ministries committed to gender. So, for the three Ministries with the National Action Plan to prevent Gender-Based Violence - the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs have budget lines committed to the National Action Plan on Gender Based Violence (NAP-GBV). Yes, honourable Premila Kumar we are spending the money. Yes, we are. In fact, honourable Vasu and I have just returned from a workshop that gathered our traditional leaders, so they are consulted on the way forward in order to implement the NAP-GBV.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- *Vinaka.*

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We commit to Parliament continually to all Fijian women and girls and we will be informing you of the progress of this Fiji WEENAP and we assure you that our Ministry will continue to be the driving force for gender equality within our Government, but I am very gratefully for the able leadership of our honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka who is the Champion for Gender Equality and continue to commit budget (actual finances) so it is not just

all talk Opposition during your time, committed so that these action plans will be realised.

HON. S. NAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the question was in two parts:

1. Update how this Plan was developed; and
2. the implementation.

From the very comprehensive Ministerial Statement received, I see that it is all about development and workshops. Is this another no action talk only activity of this Coalition Government? It is only talk. It has taken them one year to develop the activity plan.

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

HON. S. NAND.- When will they start implementing? After they finish their four-year term in Parliament?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I really thank the enthusiasm of the honourable Member. I do not think he was listening to my response when I stated that in the meantime, we have to undertake extensive consultations and then come up with a plan to implement which is at consultations, something they never did during their time. They just came out with plans without consultations.

We are conducting proper consultations with the stakeholders including the women's organisations. We need talk to the women in order to come up with a plan. I mentioned the entire timeline, honourable Member, by late this year or early next year we will be able to have that fully consulted National Action Plan before we can then implement which is what is happening to the National Action Plan to prevent Gender Based Violence. We started it last year, it is now being implemented from the 1st March this year.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, honourable Minister for the very comprehensive speech.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Sharma, please, be concise with your question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Sure, I will be, Madam Deputy Speaker. To curb the graph of gender imbalance when it comes to landownership and cultivation for Fijian women, I was looking and trying to hear where it is covered in your statement about the Women's Economic Empowerment Plan? Where is it going to address the ability for women to acquire land and increase participation in agriculture with the sole purpose of them being agri-entrepreneurs. As you have highlighted, participation at all levels, so I was looking for this important aspect because the way to improve this country is through agriculture.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not often that I agree with honourable Sharma, but this point that he has made, yes, we do need to engage our women in agriculture and the Ministry for Agriculture is committed to women in agriculture in terms of their programmes. But, yes, they are being consulted also in this process that I mentioned and then when we do have the plan in place, then we will be able to implement but we are engaging by the end of this year (I mentioned) or early next year will be the implementation of the plan. We are heavily consulting our women including our women in the agriculture space.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, we ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), now you are coming up with another terminology Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (WEENAP). I

have stated so many times in Parliament, the action must match the rhetoric - data, consultation, data, consultation. There is a difference between action and consultation.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You did nothing, you never did consultation.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- We have so much data in the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Report that talks about poverty throughout gender, sector, geographic regions; data is already in existence. What the women of this country want to ask, and they need answers on is, what is there now?

HON. S.S. KIRAN.- That is data, not consultation.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you honourable Leader of the Opposition. In terms of the timeline, yes, we start off with the data, but we do need to consult and that is what we are doing now to consult our women.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is going to take some time to consult because we are looking at several key settings which includes traditional leaders, our faith-based organisations but most importantly is talking to our women. Did you talk to our women during your time? No, even the data does not reflect that. We are now talking to our women, we need to listen to our women to inform our decisions and we are putting money where our mouth is, we are putting money through our budget and that is what is happening in this Government; something that has never been done before especially by the previous government. So, we are very happy to actually commit financially and also the political will to do so, and that is what we are committed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank you. Our Oral Question time is over, I see 12.38 p.m. on the clock. We are going to adjourn for lunch and the first bell after lunch will ring at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.38 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you will have noticed yesterday and today that we have had few cohorts of students from the University of the South Pacific and we have another group here with us this afternoon. Welcome to your Parliament, ladies and gentlemen and I hope you will learn a few good lessons from us and from how Parliament works.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, can I raise a Point of Order?

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 74(1)(a) and I quote:

“Any member may only raise a point of order if –

(a) there is an alleged breach of Standing Orders or practices of Parliament.”

Earlier this morning, the honourable Leader of the Opposition in raising a question around infrastructure, I think with shipping, he mentioned that the demise of the shipbuilding industry was caused by the SVT Government. I think he has myopia. The Qarase Government created the shipbuilding industry and then the FijiFirst Government actually killed it. Madam Deputy Speaker, on public record, can the honourable Leader of the Opposition correct his statement.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That’s not a Point of Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It’s a practice, you need to be accurate in Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Can I please have the advice of the Madam Secretary-General?

Thank you for your patience, honourable Members. The Madam Secretary-General has clarified that it is a clarification perhaps that Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica raised a Point of Order on.

Written Question

Professional Workforce – Overseas Workers and Skilled Professional Fijians
(Question No. 19/2024)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

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

- (a) the number of overseas workers who have entered the workforce from January 2023 until 31st January, 2024, by country and trade/skill sectors; and
- (b) the number of skilled and professional Fijians who left our shores for work, education or immigration in 2023 to date by sector and professional categories.

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

**REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Ministry of Local Government Annual Report 2018-2019 which was tabled on 21st November, 2020.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government is designed to deliver across two areas:

1. Local Government; and
2. Town and Country Planning.

The Department of Local Government monitors legislative compliance of municipal councils and oversees the delivery of effective and efficient services and quality infrastructure for the Fijian people at the Local Government level.

The Department of Town and Country Planning on the other hand is responsible for the overall administration, planning and regulating of land use through the Town Planning Act Cap. 139 and the Subdivision of Land Act Cap. 140. Its focus is on strategic planning of urban and rural areas, the formulation of related regulations and compliance with development laws. The Department also offers physical planning and land use development advice to the whole of Government as well as to the private sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry during the year under review undertook major capital projects which includes the following:

1. The improvement of ventilation and lighting of the Lautoka Market;
2. The continuation of construction works at Laqere Municipal Market and Lautoka Botanical Garden;
3. The swimming pool in Lautoka;
4. The completion of Namaka Market; and
5. The redevelopment of Govind Park in Ba.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry also continues to improve on rezoning applications, building approvals and service goals.

The Committee as part of its findings and recommendations identified the following:

1. That the Ministry produce timely submission of its Annual Reports;
2. The Committee notes the delay in completion of capital projects and recommends that the Ministry works in consultation with relevant municipal councils in ensuring that products are monitored to ensure timely completion of these capital projects; and
3. The Committee noted that late submission of proposals for Government funded capital projects by the municipal councils and recommends that the Ministry work together with the municipal councils on trainings and learning development plans as this will contribute

to the capacity building of municipal staff.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on that note, I support the motion before Parliament.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers as follows:

1. Honourable R.R. Sharma;
2. Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government;
3. Honourable P.D. Kumar; and
4. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to contribute to the debate on the Review of the Ministry of Local Government Annual Report 2018-2019. If I highlight one of the recommendations, the Committee is asking for timely submissions of the Ministry's Annual Report and this is imperative as it calls for the Ministry of Local Government to place priority in getting the accounts of all the municipalities audited and up to-date. This will provide accurate and up to-date financial information that is necessary for effective decision making.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the things highlighted was one of the projects that has been on the lips of every Fijian in the past few years, the Lautoka Swimming Pool Project. It was the vision under the Lautoka City Council to build a swimming pool of international standards. Just as we witnessed the success of the Churchill Park being able to host international games, inspire the younger generation for a career in sports, boost income generation and also boost the confidence of our Fijian enterprises and consumers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, for a pool to meet international standards and comply with Federation Internationale de Natation or International Swimming Federation (FINA) requirements, this was the reason for the construction cost to increase to \$12.6 million. The Lautoka Swimming Pool concept was approved in January 2017, with construction beginning in 2018. Despite the delays, and with Fiji witnessing a global pandemic, countries fell, economies fell, about 90 percent of the construction is done. What has been done is the kids pool, a training pool and an Olympic-size pool.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in fact, some of these esteemed politicians harped about the financial mismanagement and waste of taxpayer's money behind the Lautoka Swimming Pool project, it was part of most people's election campaign and their social media. However, in the 2023-2024 National Budget, the Coalition Government sets aside \$4.5 million for the completion of the pool.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Because it was a mess.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- I am coming to your mess.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in a matter of accountability and transparency, I would like to refer to this media article because I need to provide evidence with everything we say here. Thank you, honourable Manoa.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on 12th April, 2024, it says, "One pool may be demolished and the Olympic size pool will be downsized." This is an article in the *Fiji Sun*. With reference to this article, who gives a staggering amount of \$4.5 million to demolish and downsize a swimming pool that was 90 percent complete - this Coalition Government. From this article, it can be referred that

if there is a change of scope, then there is a need for a project manager. It would be obvious that a project manager will be required to lead this and the people of Lautoka are talking, “I wonder which one of the Coalition candidates or supporters will get this job.” Who knows, we hope to see an Expression of Interest for the job opportunity, if there is one. With reference to this article, if I generalise this, instead of completing and filling water into the swimming pool, it seems that the Coalition Government has allocated \$4.5 million to put soil in the pool by downsizing it for domestic use only.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is disastrous for our economy and the youths of the country who seem to have a career in sports. In the last 16 months, after the \$122 million turbine deal blunder, this is another rumoured disaster, one of the many. This is the level of wastage of taxpayers’ money under the Coalition Government just within 16 months. God forbid, can imagine 16 years of running a country. I urge the honourable Minister for Local Government to ask serious questions to the Lautoka City Council. With reference to this media article, with \$4.5 million to downsize a pool shows the lack of vision of the Coalition Government, the lack of understanding for the need of such an infrastructure to boost the career in sports for our youths. This is the level of wastage and is of no surprise under the honourable Minister for Finance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to conclude, poor accountability and poor transparency seems to be a continued practice under the Coalition Government. As the responsible honourable Minister for Finance, in fact, I have grown up watching Parliament sessions, he was a person who stood in Parliament and spoke about economic policies. He preached and lectured about economic policies, but I urge the honourable Minister for Finance to get out of his economic books and deal with the practicality of running Fiji’s economy. Again, I urge the honourable Prime Minister to conduct a surprise reshuffle very soon. This is disastrous under this Government. I fully support the recommendations made by the Committee and I call upon the Ministry of Local Government to take necessary steps to implement that.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion that is before Parliament. After listening to the presentation by honourable Sharma this afternoon, he raised a point that he was trying to justify some of the wrongdoings and mismanagement of only one capital project which is the Lautoka Swimming Pool. But the report itself talks about four key findings of the report and he should have focused more on those findings rather than focusing on a project that was disastrous in terms of the former Government.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Very poor!

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government acknowledges the key findings and recommendations of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs and I thank them for their thorough review and practical recommendations. There were key issues that were identified by the Committee and if you analyse all these key findings, these are all legacy issues and all governance-related issues.

Firstly, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the timely submission of the Ministry’s Annual Report. This issue has been a recurring matter, not only in the Ministry but also with all Municipal Councils in Fiji, but we have managed to address this legacy issue. As of now, the Office of the Auditor-General has completed audits of the Ministry’s financials for four financial years, that is, 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023. The Ministry is finalising the narrative of the Annual Reports, and we shall complete and table all these Reports in Cabinet and Parliament before the end of 2024.

Secondly, Madam Deputy Speaker, is for the Ministry to review relevant legislations as this will impact the work of the Ministry. The Ministry has commenced groundwork on the review of

relevant legislation that govern the whole Ministry. These are the:

- Town and Country Planning Act 1946;
- Subdivision of Land Act 1937; and
- Local Government Act 1972.

Recently, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have reviewed the Local Government Act in terms of reducing the default interest rates on the accrued general rates from 11 percent to 5 percent. It also changed the methodology from compound interest rate to simple interest rate. This is, indeed, a great relief for defaulting ratepayers who have difficulty in repaying their current dues, as well as their arrears. In addition, the said Act has been amended to include the necessary changes for the upcoming Local Government elections.

Madam Deputy Speaker, work is also underway for the review and amendment of the Town Planning Act to reflect the proposed changes that have been undertaken. Furthermore, there will be further amendments that will be done to reflect the digitalisation of the building permit applications and approvals.

A very important issue that was highlighted by the Committee is the timely monitoring and completion of capital projects for all Municipal Councils. Madam Deputy Speaker, weak project monitoring policies and supervision in the that past years have contributed to poor supervision and monitoring of some key Municipal Council projects, like the Lautoka Swimming Pool, the Govind Park in Ba and we have one in Suva, the Ratu Sukuna Park. That is why there is a need to bring back the Local Government elections.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- We need to have Local Government elections. We need councillors, we need people who are going to take full responsibility and accountability in managing the affairs of respective councils.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry has also provided a Project Management Policy, with monitoring and reporting templates to guide the Municipal Councils. The Councils, as of this financial year, have been providing detailed project management templates for the release of grants.

The Councils manage capital projects in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, the Procurement Regulation 2010 and other enabling legislations. In addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry monitors projects through regular site visits, project meetings and respective project teams.

A very important issue that was identified is for the Ministry to work with Municipal Councils on training and learning development plans as this will contribute to the capacity building of Municipal staff. This is something that we take very seriously and the Ministry, in collaboration with the Office of the Auditor-General, recently conducted training on audit processes, financial reporting, internal controls and key accounting areas for all Special Administrators, Chief Executive Officers, Finance Managers, as well as Accountants.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry has provided training on both, Finance and Human Resource Manuals to CEOs and Finance and Human Resources Teams. Furthermore, the Councils further underwent training by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) on Masterplan for Solid Waste Management for 30 Municipalities as part of the Japanese Technical Cooperation Project for promotion of regional initiative on solid waste management. In addition to the above, the Ministry

will work with Councils collectively to look at the standard training and development policy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee has also highlighted the need for Municipal Councils to complete the two major capital projects - the Lautoka Swimming Pool and Govind Park in Ba. The Coalition Government is committed to complete these capital projects.

The Lautoka City Council has recalled the tender to engage the lead consultant who will oversee the project management and construction works. Upon finalisation of this process, the tender for the contractor will be published.

There was also a comment by honourable Sharma regarding the demolition of the swimming pool. I do not know where he got his information from and that needs to be verified...

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- *The Fiji Sun*.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- ... but it is something that the Council is going to review. There will be a change in the scoping of the whole project. We are going to rescope the project before we finalise all the details about the Lautoka Swimming Pool.

Also, for the Govind Park Project, honourable Bala is very keen about this because he started the project and has completed the first phase. The tender for the contractor to undertake civil works of phase two of the project was advertised last December by the Fiji Procurement Office. So, currently, evaluation is in the process and hopefully, tender should be finalised soon. We also expected the construction work to begin before the end of this financial year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you, once again, for this opportunity to speak on this motion in Parliament and I fully support the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion that is before Parliament, and I take this opportunity to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the comprehensive Review Report on the Ministry of Local Government for the fiscal year 2018-2019. I also would like to thank speakers who have contributed to the debate before me, particularly our Minister for Local Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government plays a pivotal role in delivering range of vital services or essential services for individuals and businesses, and it is done through 13 Municipal Councils, as well as the National Fire Authority.

The Ministry of Local Government's importance in the economy is well understood. That is where the business takes place. It is a centre where people play, they live, they shop and they conduct their business. And if anything, Local Government is the hub where people come together to conduct various activities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2018-2019 fiscal year, it was marked as notable achievements for the Ministry of Local Government. Highlights include the completion of Namaka Market, the opening of new National Fire Authority building in Rakiraki, the completion of Rakiraki and Laqere Markets, the construction of a new modern toilet facility in Korovou Town and, of course, the iconic playground that we have just before our Parliament which is the Albert Park. All these work was completed during that year.

During that year, the work on the construction of the Lautoka Swimming Pool and Govind Park continued. It signified that FijiFirst Government's commitment to enhancing community

infrastructure was always there, and it continued with the development projects.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I mentioned so many projects that this Government completed and my list can go on, like Levuka Market, Savusavu Market is under construction, Ratu Sukuna Park Project which is also under construction.

Madam Deputy Speaker, out of all these projects, we have problems with only two projects which is Lautoka Swimming Pool and the Govind Park. Actually, there is no problem there, but the key problem was with the Lautoka Swimming Pool.

Now, we hear, like the honourable Minister has said, there is mismanagement and wrongdoing. If there is mismanagement and wrongdoing, I challenge the Government - you conduct your investigation, you produce the report, you file the complaints with FICAC. Just do not come and say things here. You need to understand the root cause of the problem.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we build our own house, we go through so many difficulties with the contractor. Sometimes, the contractors run away with our money and sometimes the builders do not pay the contractor. Now, similar situation was faced with the Lautoka Swimming Pool where there was a dispute between the contractors and the Lautoka City Council. The dispute was there, and the dispute had to be solved.

I must say, there was a vision for Lautoka Swimming Pool. The vision was to fit into Lautoka City Council's vision which was to make Lautoka City a sports city. At that time, there were students from Australia and New Zealand who were used to come and play sports in Lautoka and for that reason, the mission, vision and the thinking was to develop Lautoka City as a sports city.

Everything was working in that direction. Initially, the plan was to build a community swimming pool and then it was changed to an aquatic centre – Olympic international standard. Of course, the cost will go up.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the cost did go up so now, when the dispute did arise, it was decided that the Ministry of Local Government and Lautoka City Council should not be involved because it was Government funding and, therefore, Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) stepped in and they conducted a peer review, in consultation with the stakeholders, and a report came out. The idea of that report was to solve the issue that was before us. But then the Election took place and, of course, it is history now and we expect the Government side to complete the project. So, that is the story on the Lautoka Swimming Pool, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is very important that we complete that project in the way it was designed because we can already see the benefits accruing from Churchill Park when rugby games are held there.

Madam Deputy Speaker, why should we deny the people of Lautoka from having this competition in Lautoka? Whenever there is a competition, why should everyone come to Suva? It is decentralising the activities in two cities. That was the whole plan, so we had that vision.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to highlight that if they are really going to downsize the project, then obviously it is not going to fit into the vision of Lautoka City Council. Therefore, I urge the ratepayers to step in and they should ensure that this project is completed.

But Madam Deputy Speaker, it appears that this Government is actually anti-development. That is why only 20 percent of the National Budget went to its capital works and 80 percent for operational, so that they can travel overseas more frequently, for excursion trips, et cetera.

With FijiFirst Government, Madam Deputy Speaker, we had 60 percent of our budget that was used for operational, whereas 40 percent went towards capital works. That is why today when you go to Rakiraki, you see this nice market.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You go to Levuka, you will see a nice market there and that is how we grow the economy. We provide a place for small businesses to come to this place and they conduct their business. Along with that, we also provided accommodation for women.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister can speak about the problems that Municipal Councils had previously and I can assure you after your four year term, you will find that the problems still persist. I can guarantee you that because there are lot of challenges when it comes to planning, execution and monitoring of projects.

With the FijiFirst Government, we had established CIU. The work of the CIU was to be responsible for public projects funded by the Government and it was actually to centralise all the expertise in one place for better standards, better designs and for the better outcome.

Unfortunately, the Government has disbanded CIU. What does that mean? It simply means that each and every Ministry, like the Ministry of Local Government, need to have that expertise, so additional cost to the Ministry.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It was a complete disaster.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- All that is now required.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Members, we are also eating into honourable Kumar's speaking time. Thank you for your respect.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the future vision of consolidating Government funded projects under CIU's purview, from inception to handover, mirrors well with international best practices observed in countries like UK, Australia and many other countries. For example, in the UK, they have Infrastructure and Projects Authority. In Australia, they have Infrastructure Australia. So, what do we see in Fiji? We are just going backwards with our projects. For example, we can see the Government's reluctance to embrace forward thinking strategies and that hampers progress and undermines the potential for impactful change. This Government is stuck in the past, it lacks innovation in service delivering across Government and now we will see it in Local Government as well.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Can I just, please, remind honourable Members that my title is "Deputy Speaker". Mr. Speaker, is actually watching this, I do not want to get demoted this afternoon.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Ministry of Local Government 2018-2019 Annual Report.

Firstly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am intrigued with the preoccupation of the other side of Parliament with the swimming pool because the fact of the matter is, they have made a mess of that project. This is the real fact. When they selected the contractor to do that project, that person was not qualified to build that swimming pool.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are lying. You are misleading Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- There is only one contractor in Fiji that is actually qualified to do it. I heard that from the person who is actually the qualified contractor. So, from the word 'go'...

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are misleading. You should be ashamed.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- ...they actually selected the wrong contractor. They are talking about this and that but, in fact, I heard that the swimming pool was not even to the correct measurement. It was short by about 10 centimetres or something. It was short, and that is why the rectification is taking place. So, stop meandering around and saying this and that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are misleading.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The real story is, you mucked up. And it reminds me of my analogy, Madam Deputy Speaker, about the Nabukalou Creek. The tide goes out, what do you see?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Shame on you!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The mess, that is, the people on the other side of Parliament have created.

Madam Deputy Speaker, allow me to contribute in terms of the spirit of the Report. The first thing that caught my attention was the second paragraph in the background that states, and I quote:

“The Department of Local Government monitors legislative compliance of the Municipal Councils and oversees the delivery or efficient services, quality construction....”

This morning, the honourable Assistant of Finance talked about the lack of governance in the Local Municipalities, Madam Deputy Speaker. What he actually said troubled me, and I quote:

“In fact, what was clear that the Municipal Council and the Ministry of Local Government were not serious with the PAC recommendations after it was raised numerous occasions in Parliament for them to address those recurring audit issues.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other side of Parliament are standing on a broken ship. They had actually been mismanaging Local Government for so many years. It has gone into a stage where they are actually using Government funds to subsidise Local Municipalities.

In the last four years, for the record year, the Budget was about \$85 million and I can bet my last dollar on this, Madam Deputy Speaker, had they been running local Councils that were actually elected Councils and had proper governance and procedures, we probably would not be spending this kind of money on Local Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sad to say to the other side of Parliament when you look at Local Government, remember Nabukalou Creek.

(Laughter)

Madam Deputy Speaker, just to round off, I thought I just talk a bit about some of the positive things that this side of Parliament is doing. One of the areas of oversight by the honourable Minister is the Department of Town and Country Planning. I would like to address specifically the Ease of Doing Business. We know for a fact that investment in this country has been held back significantly because of the inefficiencies in the Department of Town and Country Planning.

Over the last few years, started by the previous government, but we are going to finish it, we are embarking on an actual process of automation that will transform the approval process in the Ministry of Local Government. Right now, you actually have to make three copies of all your project documentations, hand it over to the Local Government and it gets distributed amongst all the agencies of Government, and lots of the time the excuse is, it is lost, we cannot find it. By next year, we will actually have an automated system in place.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We started bizFIJI.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- A document gets submitted once and it actually gets sorted out.

Madam Deputy Speaker, contrary to what honourable Premila Kumar is saying, we are forward looking. We are committed to actually bring about genuine Ease of Doing Business in this country and we are working very closely with the honourable Minister for Local Government to ensure that what is normally in some cases, a three-year process...

(Laughter)

... is contracted to about 12 months to 18 months. If we can achieve that, there will be a ripple effect on the economic growth in this country. Finally, if the country wants to ask, "Why is the Ministry for Local Government in such shambles?" It is very simple, they decided to remove the election of the Councils. They removed a fundamental aspect of democracy.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are learning democracy now.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- This is a learning for them. When you empower your people, they will deliver for you. In this case, if you will look at what the honourable Assistant Minister had said, I will read this out so that the people of Fiji can hear it. This is about delayed financial statements: Nadi - 2017; Sigatoka - 2020; Tavua - 2016; Rakiraki -2020 and 2021; Levuka - 2014 and 2015; Labasa - 2018; Lami - 2015; Nausori - 2015; Savusavu - 2011 and Nasinu - 2011 and 2012. It is a mess. Nabukalou Creek. This is what they have given to the people of Fiji, and this side of Parliament will fix it.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Members who have contributed to the debate on the motion before Parliament. I have no further comments.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT- MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, NATIONAL SECURITY
AND POLICING 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing Annual Report 2018-2019 which was tabled on 21st November, 2023.

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Report has five recommendations. You are well versed of this Report yourself and before I gloss through the recommendations, if I may just take this opportunity to wish our peacekeepers all the best especially those serving in the Middle-East given what is happening over there, the attack from Iran to Israel, those in the Golan would be somewhere in the middle, those serving in Iraq much more closer to Iran; our prayers are with them and their families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the five recommendations in this Report, we feel that if the Ministry implements will help them in achieving the outcomes that they have. The fifth recommendation is on the War Memorial, and we are recommending that attempts be made to finish the National War Memorial, I think almost all the names that are there at the War Memorial has some connections to most of the Fijians. We hope that some money can be allocated in the next financial year to finish off that project.

The recommendation on the Search and Rescue Bill is a good one, we are recommending that it be fast-tracked so that we can have this umbrella where the Search and Rescue Manual comes under. It will establish the Fiji Rescue and Coordination Centre.

Also, there is a recommendation on human trafficking. We found that there was very little information on human trafficking, both from the Ministry and also from the Fiji Police. We called both the staff from the Ministry and the Police during our *talanoa* session. We find that very little information is provided in that report on human trafficking, but I think the Ministry and the Police are the two responsible agencies for dealing with human trafficking. We get reported on by the US and we are given a rating on human trafficking, we are currently on tier 2. We are asking that human trafficking be part of the Report so that it remains at the forefront of policymakers thinking because the people that do it, they go underground.

There is a recommendation on the Security Industry Act 2010 and the need for it to be reviewed as and when required and perhaps put in place the measures to collect the fees. There is a much outstanding fee, we understand that those outstanding fees had to do with COVID-19 also. They were allowed to just operate and collect the fees afterwards and perhaps that can be done. I will leave it there, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I think there are some who would like to speak on those topics.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and the list of speakers is as follows:

1. Honourable Aliko Bia;
2. Honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration;

3. Honourable Ioane Naivalurua; and
4. Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources;

HON. A. BIA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on the Report before Parliament which is the Review of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing Annual Report 2018 - 2019.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Committee Chairman and the members of the Committee for their thorough deliberation and findings on the Report being reviewed. I wish to dwell on one of the important findings of the Committee and that is the call for a Review of the Security Industry Act. The Committee clearly highlighted in the Report that there is no mechanism in place to establish the total number of security companies in Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Review Report by the Committee noted that they were informed by the Ministry that a draft Cabinet Paper has been prepared to advise Cabinet of the review of the Security Industry Act. It is very critical and important to fast track this review of the Security Industry Act given the role they play in our communities and neighbourhood. Given the increase of social issues and continuous change of the behavioural pattern of our young generation, this also increases the threat our local security officers face on a daily basis.

Madam Deputy Speaker, proper scrutiny of security companies is vital to ensure that they recruit the best people for the job. If you look at the context of the work of our security officers, they are very close to our homes more than the police officers. So, families in the communities do entrust their safety and protection of their wealth and assets to the security officers when they are at any job site given on the day.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the Committee in the call for a review of the Security Industry Act to ensure that security personnel and various security companies are well resourced and equipped with the necessary tools of maintaining the safety and peace of all Fijians. With that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion and the Report before Parliament.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, first of all I thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts on the Report of the Committee that is before Parliament right now and a Committee of which you are a member. As your Chairman had alluded to earlier that you are quite familiar with the recommendations that are here, the five main ones are noted. Today I would like to stick to the five recommendations and inform Parliament and the nation in terms of what the Ministry is doing, particularly about these recommendations that you have put to Parliament.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the Chairman and the Members of the Standing Committee for a very comprehensive Report. I know that the Report was for 2018 and 2019, but I note that some of the recommendations that you have made are quite pertinent to now and the experiences that we are facing and the needs that we have.

The first thing that I would like to assure Parliament today is that the Ministry is cognisant of this Report and the recommendations that are within because it is actually quite elaborate, and I thank the Committee for that.

The Chairman of the Committee has actually shared much of the information that I would like to inform Parliament, particularly some of the Bills and the legislations that the Committee is proposing because these are really ongoing, particularly about the search and rescue that the Chairman had referred to earlier. This is very important. In the last Cabinet, we discussed about the

Disaster Management Policy of Government going forward. It has not come to Parliament yet but it is kind of trying to integrate all of the national effects, allow for all of us to work together and part of that also is search and rescue on how Government deals with the agencies, particularly the Republic of Fiji Navy that does a lot of this work at sea, also and those that have to go out into inland to do search and rescue.

The legislation is surely supposed to complement that search and rescue. We will continue to push for these legislations, particularly the Bill to come before Parliament. I know that the Search and Rescue Manual was launched in 2019 so the Bill is yet to be tabled.

Secondly, I want to talk about human trafficking. The mention of the National Action Plan and the National Referral Mechanism, which is what they are calling now, we have a National Committee that is looking at that chaired by the Ministry. Obviously, this is a very complex area as the Chairman has mentioned and the lack of data is something we recognise, but that has been a persistent issue, we recognise that and we want to improve on it. It is the safety of our people, we hear all these sorts of ridiculous stories about people trying to steal our nationals so to speak and take them overseas for reasons of their own. We are very mindful of that, and we would like to make sure that we do not continue to repeat the same mistakes but that can only be done by good data.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to talk about the Security Industry Act. This is also under review at the moment and the honourable Member is quite right in that a lot of people, companies in particular, homes depend on security officers, but we have got to make sure that they are properly legislated and certain laws allow them to be able to do their work properly and secure their own homes and businesses. We are understanding of that need, and we would like to respond to it. The Security Industry Act obviously is something that we are reviewing because it requires the stringent measures that we need to put in place to be able to ensure the companies that we register, and they are coming by the dozens are effective and value for money for Fiji. They are actually there for the purpose of which people have sought their services.

The fourth recommendation refers to vacancies within the Ministry. A lot of that has been filled for the benefit of the Committee. We are experiencing a very high turnover especially at the Department of Immigration and it is very hard to keep these people here because they are very attractive on the market, so we need to continually look at this as well, especially now that we have the Department of Immigration in our care, subject to a lot of debate right now as well as the Ministry too.

We are commencing the National Security and Defence Review, so we are reviewing the whole Ministry. Really this is the central of the work that we want to do. Once the head is fixed then I am sure, the three major functions under Ministry; the RFMF, Fiji Police Force and the Immigration that have their own legislations and laws should be able to align with the national policies that the values that we want to uphold. That really is the essence of a lot of the work that we do, and this report is about that. I would like to assure Parliament and the Committee for bringing this Report that we are trying as much as we can to, not only fill these vacancies, but make sure that we are staffed and equipped properly to do the work that we are mandated to do.

Last but not least, on the matter of the War Memorial that is in the work that we want to do next year, we are doing some of the maintenance work right now but those additions that the Committee has alluded to, one particular one is the National War Museum. I think the building is there and that is one of the major recommendations. We are allocating money for that. I know there is a lot of RFMF and military historians that want to capture the stories of our experiences in the past. Unfortunately, there is no place where this is stored and we would like to make that available to the

public to understand the sacrifices that our ancestors made for us to be able to be here today, particularly technically providing for us the peace that we enjoy.

It is also very important to remember the past, so part of this work that we are doing and hopefully something that we are putting up to Ministry of Finance in this next year's budget is to help us build the National War Museum. So former Commanding Officers of the First Battalion and Second Battalion, I know the First Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion is very eager to capture the lessons from Sinai from when it started. We are working hard plus all of the other requirements in trying to make the National War Memorial a place that we can all go to and honour the memory of those that had served their lives for our future and also for our today.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, my contribution to the motion on the floor will be very short, especially after the presentation by the honourable Minister for Home Affairs. His made my work much easier and shorter. Let me take this time to simply say that human trafficking is here. It is happening here at home not only locally but also abroad. That is the reality of the situation. If it is not addressed, confronted, or effectively taken care of, it can be the same as what we are confronted with right now with drugs. We had talked about many substantives and very important issues relating to our economy, prosperity and the future, but you know and I know that all these things can only come about when we have a safe, stable home and prosperity; economic growth will come.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the issue at hand therefore to me and I am sure to all of us is absolutely critical at this point in time. Not many of us understand what human trafficking in person is all about. Let me relate very shortly my experience with this. When I was in China as a representative of Fiji, we received an urgent report relating to three females who were stranded in Hong Kong. It took us some time to intervene. To cut the story short, when we sent a team to Hong Kong, we found out that they were lured into Hong Kong for a job opportunity. When we traced and investigated further, they were basically reported here at home as missing from home.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is exactly how many of us understand what human trafficking in person is about. I thank the honourable Minister for his assurances of the things that needs to be done and addressed to this particular issue. We have noted there is progress at work under the National Action Plan and I hope that there will be closer supervision and oversight of the work to get all those outstanding issues done.

Perhaps in conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the benefit of Parliament let me read out to you the definition of human trafficking in person under the Palermo Protocol and I quote:

“Trafficking in person shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

That is an accepted definition of human trafficking in persons.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me end by urging the honourable Minister for Home Affairs, to make sure that all those outstanding Action Plans are dealt with. Secondly, I also appeal to the

honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics for the support of this Human Trafficking Unit.

We have a small element of it at the Home Affairs Headquarters but has a budget of only \$10,000. I hope given the nature and the substantive issue of this, that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister may consider, and likewise, at the Police operational level, a full support on handling of these issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I support this fully.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the motion that is before Parliament this afternoon on the Review of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing Annual Report of 2018-2019. Perhaps, if you would just allow me to first wish our strong 80 RFMF and 20 Police Officers or 100 security personnel from Fiji, who flew out of Fiji on Saturday to join the Solomon Islands International Assistance Force in the country's preparation towards their General Election which will happen tomorrow. I am sure that like the Solomon Islands population, would rely on security forces during the Elections prior and after, we, and our population here in Fiji, rely on our strong RFMF and our Police Force to provide us with the necessary security along our EEZ, our land and our local policing scenarios. They were farewelled in Nadi by the Commander of the Joint Task Force Command (JTFC), Brigadier-General Manoa Gadai, on Saturday past.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend the Report that have been shared and commented on today. I must say it is a very hard task to speak after three decorated soldiers who had taken the floor today, one a former Commander, a former Police Commissioner, Deputy Commander of the RFMF and, of course, the present Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration. They have, of course, set a very high bar for me this afternoon, beginning with a very funny joke.

Of course, we note, Madam Deputy Speaker, the need to strengthen the policies on human trafficking, to address the issue of human trafficking, nationally and transnationally, that has been shared on the floor of Parliament this afternoon.

We have a very tough legislation, tough in its definition, tough in its sentencing as well. I guess the problem is in detection, investigation and in prosecution, and those might be areas that, of course, some source of Government assistance and funding will also have to be directed towards, so that we can make our contribution to this rather larger than all of us international human trafficking problem.

Fiji also has recently signed the Palermo Protocol which is the only global binding international instrument that contains agreed upon definition that has been shared in Parliament today by honourable Naivalurua on the trafficking of persons. Of course, Fiji is still considered a tier two in terms of effort by Government on anti-trafficking capacity as published in the US 2023 Report. Although, we know that we are probably not fully compliant at this stage, we all would agree that as a country and as a bipartisan Parliament, we are making every significant effort to be compliant with the required standard.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in contribution today from my Ministry, we are delighted to say that from our part, we have secured land for the construction of the Maritime Essential Services Centre, which is up in construction in Lami. Of course, that is going to be monitored and mastered by the Fiji Navy. Over the years, we have worked hard to secure Government Stations for Police Posts, Military Bases and camps, and this also includes the Vuda Ex-Serviceman Battery Site up in the hills

of Lomolomo.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry anticipates working with the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing; Ministry of Youth and Sports; Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection; and the Ministry of Local Government and Housing in securing viable land that would provide for recreational and sporting spaces that would be used by our youth and children, so that it brings out a positive impact in their wellbeing and security, thus taking them away from the urges of urban crime and its incentives.

We have recently visited some sites here along the Suva-Nausori corridor, where, in the next financial year, we will be putting across to the Ministry of Finance some funding requests so that we can build proper parks, volleyball courts, basketball courts, as well as spaces where our children will be able to play in their spare time, thus, achieving what we all want them to achieve, that is, to take them out from the invitation to depart from crimes in their communities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, through the capital projects of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources this year, we have been able to upgrade the Geodetic Datum, that has allowed, over the years, a systemic and incremental improvement to the accuracy and position of our global positioning system for our Fiji Navigation System. Also, this is significant in assisting search and rescue for our Fiji Navy, and it includes also the monitoring of our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry, in 2022, had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fiji Police Force in the monitoring of the illegal river gravel and sand activities, and also to assist in the protection of these development resources, working in collaboration in information sharing through community policing and also would be paramount for our Ministry and also in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence. I support the motion before Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, if I can just use this few minutes, just to put a bit of emphasis on the first recommendation on search and rescue and the need for the Bill to be hurried through, if you like.

Search and rescue is quite complex. You have maritime search and rescue, land search and rescue, aeronautical search and rescue – sometimes it starts in the air and ends up as land rescue or as a maritime rescue. So, there is a lot of moving parts and a lot of agencies that are involved in search and rescue.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just three weeks ago, I was getting into my car at Cost-U-Less when this lady came up to me with a painting and said, “This is for you.” I took the painting and was looking at her, not too sure. I was trying to remember her name, but I could not put a name to the face. Then she said, “Liliana from Vanuavatu. Do you remember me?”

Then I remembered that this this lady who would be 44 years now, we had rescued her 29 years ago when she was 15 years old. She and her elder sister who was 18 years. A successful search and rescue in the most atrocious weather conditions and she introduced me to her husband and children - two girls. I was looking at them and said, “Man, had we failed that day, those two girls will not be standing there.” But search and rescue is a lifesaving mission and when we do it well, with the organisation flows, we are able to save lives, like this lady, Liliana. That was way back in 1995 and the honourable Prime Minister was the Prime Minister then at that time.

It involved a lot of agencies. We had called the Ministry, it was the Ministry of Home Affairs

then, for some money to charter an aircraft to fly, it was nearly dark, which was Fiji Airways. They flew, we could not see them, then we had to ask for the search and rescue plane that was in New Caledonia. We had to involve the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that they can get diplomatic clearance, et cetera. They flew, they located, and we managed to save these two girls who are now adults. I think both of them are grandmothers, these two ladies.

So, I would like to say that the Search and Rescue Bill is really needed as the umbrella so that all these little pieces can be put in a way in the manual and all the agencies that are involved in trying to save lives are included in there. It is smooth and the result would be like that lady. We can save lives if it is done well.

With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish the honourable Minister and staff well in the big job that they do in keeping our country safe. I certainly commend the motion to Parliament for noting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT – PUBLIC RENTAL BOARD 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report which was tabled on 22nd November, 2023.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Public Rental Board (PRB) was established on 16th May, 1989 under the Housing (Amendment) Decree No. 12 of 1989.

For the past 33 years, the PRB has provided affordable rental accommodation to low-income earners on transitional basis, and is committed to achieving its organisational roles, together with its social obligations, such as to reduce squatter settlements and promote healthy living.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Year 2020 reported the following highlights, the:

1. PRB recorded an operating profit of \$1.5 million for the year ending 31st July, 2020, which was a great achievement during the year.
2. PRB carried out maintenance work for Kia Street flats with a total number of 24 units with an expenditure of \$48,254.
3. Kalabu Housing fencing and drainage works was completed at a total expenditure of \$74,614.
4. Low Cost Housing Project at Simla, Lautoka, consisting of 36 rental units of one bedroom, the project was anticipated to be completed by the end of 2021.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee also highlighted a few findings and recommendations, as follows:

1. The PRB facilities are accessibility to persons with disabilities and recommends that it develops more rental facilities that are accessible to people living with disabilities.
2. The PRB's lack of funding to finance proposed housing estates.

The Committee recommends that it considers partnership with investors and stakeholders in financing proposed housing estates.

On that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion before Parliament.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate We will start from the Opposition, as follows:

1. Hon. J.N. Nand;
2. Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government;
3. Hon. A.N. Tuicolo; and
4. Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report that is before Parliament.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the Public Rental Board (PRB) for their commendable work as detailed in the 2020 Annual Report. This Report sets light on both the achievements in providing affordable housing for low-income Fijians and the ongoing challenges they face.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PRB's mission is clear and critical and, that is, ensuring Fijians have access to safe and affordable housing. Their success is undeniable. Over 1,600 families, translating to thousands of Fijians, can build their lives with the security of a decent roof over their heads.

The dedication extends purely in the construction evidenced by upgrades made to existing estates in places, like Kalabu and Kia Street. These improvements demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of the comfortable living conditions for tenants.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the recently completed flats in Lautoka, though delayed by unforeseen COVID-19 challenges, signifies the PRB's commitment in expanding services in the Western Division. This has provided the much needed housing options promised in Lautoka.

Madam Deputy Speaker, finance responsibility is crucial for any organisation and PRB's commitment to this is evident in their extending and consistent operational profits. This financial strength ensures the organisation can manage resources effectively and maintain long sustainability.

Furthermore, the PRB prioritises accessibility by ensuring all their flats are constructed to be accessible for persons with disabilities, fostering a truly inclusive living environment.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the demand for affordable housing continues to what we supply. We must acknowledge and address these key challenges head-on. Facilitating home ownership for tenants is a key concern. While affordable rent is crucial, we also want to empower tenants to achieve their dream of owning a home.

The Report acknowledges the low-average of only five tenants transitioning to home ownership per year. We need to explore ways to improve this further.

Madam Deputy Speaker, securing funding for new projects remains a significant obstacle. The PRB requires a steady stream of resources to keep up with Fiji's growing housing needs.

The Report mentions a lack of available land as a major hindrance, especially in urban centres. Creative solutions are needed to maximise land usage while maintaining affordability. Rising construction cost due to material and labour further complicate things.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PRB is also exploring the development of residential housing and even commercial ventures. This diversification could generate a sustainable source of income to support future affordable housing projects. However, the Report rightly emphasises the need to balance affordability for tenants with any diversification effects.

The 2020 PRB Annual Report showcases a remarkable organisation. The achievements in providing affordable housing are commendable, and a commitment to innovative solution paves way for a brighter future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, by acknowledging the challenges and working together, the Government, private sector and the Fijian people as a whole, we can ensure every Fijian family have access to secure and affordable home. We must seek further details on PRB's plans for a long term financial sustainability on the rent to own specific schemes and the impact on affordability.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the PRB in their mission. Together, we can create a future where affordable housing is not just a dream but a reality for all.

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

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion and commend the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on the review of the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the review of the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report commended PRB with achievements in providing affordable housing and outlined recommendations to enhance its operations, promote inclusivity and address challenges in the housing sector. The Report underscores the importance of sustainable development, financial prudence and social responsibility and PRB's mandate to serve the community effectively.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the PRB plays a crucial role in providing affordable, quality and appropriate housing flats to low income earning customers since its establishment. The PRB provides options for those who may otherwise struggle to find affordable housing. The key contribution not only addresses an immediate need for shelter but also alleviate poverty and inequality in our society.

Madam Deputy Speaker, PRB provides a total of 1,673 rental flats throughout its 21 estates across Fiji. With 11 estates, it has a total of 1,037 rental flats in the Central Division, six estates with a total of 432 rental flats in the Western Division, and four estates with the Northern Division with a total of 204 rental flats.

It is very interesting to note, Madam Deputy Speaker, that from the above data, a total of 257 tenants out of 1,673 tenants, or equivalent to 15 percent, have been renting for more than 20 years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, graduating from public rental to home ownership is a significant milestone for individuals and families. It requires careful planning, financial discipline and perseverance. In the past five years, a total of only 42 families have graduated from public rental and have achieved their dream of owning a home. The rate of people graduating from renting to home ownership is really low and it is a big challenge for the Board to address this issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker, graduation to home ownership will now be complemented with the formulation of a rent to own scheme that will transition tenants from renting to owning their homes. This scheme will provide an opportunity for tenants who may not have the financial means to purchase a home outright. The Ministry together with the Public Rental Board (PRB) are currently working on this policy and hopefully it should be completed before the end of this financial year.

Additionally, Madam Deputy Speaker, the PRB tenants have been offered financial literacy and home ownership programme to provide them a pathway in understanding the process of owning a home. It is imperative that PRB estates are inclusive of people living with disability, therefore the Board will ensure that accessibility audits be carried out on the existing estates to identify areas that may require retrofitting to improve access for tenants living with disabilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Board will also ensure that any future development projects will have disability friendly features such as ramps, handles and accessible bathrooms to allow people living with disability easy access within and around their units.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while we promote inclusivity in rental housing, demands for rental unit also increases. It is very interesting to note that the Board's waiting list as of the year 2020 was 152. The Board has been receiving applications to-date, the number of waiting applicants has increased to 200. It indicates the demand that exist, hence the need to provide more affordable housing units. To address this issue, the PRB will be completing the Lagilagi Low Cost Housing Project that will produce 36 units. This will be internally funded by the Board and have also pursued development sites at Namelimeli in Navua, Matavolivoli in Nadi and Waitovu in Levuka, which is estimated to provide a total of 157 units.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government provides grants to PRB for rental subsidies allocated by the Board to tenants based on the tenant's weekly gross income. To receive rental subsidy, a household should earn an annual income of less than \$13,000 or a weekly gross income of \$250 or less. For the year under review, the Board's recent allocation of \$1.36 million for rental subsidy for a total of more than 1,000 families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you once again for allowing me to contribute to the Review of the Public Rental Board and I also wish to thank the staff and management of PRB for all their hard work and contributions to-date. I fully support the motion before Parliament.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to make a short contribution to the motion moved by the honourable Bainivalu, the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Review of the Public Rental Board 2020 Annual Report. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in formulating this review. I commend the Public Rental Board for the work they do in ensuring Sustainable Development Goal 11 targets are being met in ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing units and basic services which also contributes to reducing population in informal or squatter settlements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I noted that the Committee through its deliberation, formulated three key findings and one of the findings was the slow graduating of rental tenants to owning homes which

is an average of five every year. Promoting migration to home ownership is one of the Public Rental Board's missions which ensures that it achieves its vision which is to be the leading provider of affordable, quality and appropriate rental housing for its tenants.

Madam Deputy Speaker, many have their own reasons when applying for rental flats from the Public Rental Board. I was one of the pioneer tenants at the new Raiwai PRB Flats. Most of us were residing out of Suva and our only need was finding a dwelling that was decent, convenient, safe and affordable and that it would accommodate us whilst working or attending a high education institution in Suva. For five years, the rented flat was home to our family and the option of migrating to home ownership was not a priority. Our priority was securing a decent and affordable accommodation to house our family whilst working and studying in Suva.

Madam Deputy Speaker, most of the current PRB tenants at the Raiwai PRB Flats would have similar reasons for renting in this particular property, which I believe could be a contributing factor to the slow movement of graduating tenants from rental to home ownership.

The second key finding was that the PRB's facilities are accessible to persons living with disabilities. I understand that the new Raiwai PRB property accommodates a few elderly tenants and tenants currently living with disabilities. With the existing building plan, PRB should consider modifying the access to these bottom flats so that it can be disability friendly. With the Committee's recommendation, PRB should consider when developing housing that will enhance community living and is disability friendly in future projects.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also noted that the Committee recommends a partnership with investors and stakeholders in financing proposed PRB Housing Estates. Securing the funding will not only provide additional rented flats but it will also fulfil its social and economic obligations and that is to reduce squatter settlements, promote healthy living and house urban workforce.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to highlight a few ongoing issues raised by tenants in some of the RPB Estates which is the low water pressure experienced by tenants residing on the top flats, noise becoming a major concern to tenants due to children left unsupervised, *kava* and liquor consumption within the premises and inconsiderate attitudes of individuals who indulge in such activities and the delay in maintenance of flats that are currently occupied by tenants. These problems have been brought to my attention which I believe PRB must look into these issues and must rectify the problem.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in conclusion the growing demand and high number of wait list clearly shows that there is a market and that PRB and the Government must seriously consider ways to address the shortage of rented flats that would generate more income. I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not intend to keep us here until before 4.30 p.m. May I just, perhaps add to the contributions in Parliament this afternoon that from 2018 to 2024 the figures from the Ministry of Finance would suggest that in throughout all those years, just below \$7.5 million had been allocated in terms of operating and capital grant by Government to PRB to sustain the operations of providing accessible and affordable housing to Fijians where the 20 estates are allocated all throughout Fiji.

I would also like to commend the work that had been put thus far by the management and the staff of PRB, in addition to their Report that we have this afternoon. There is also to be noted, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the management of PRB has gone to great lengths to strengthen mechanisms of governance and to ensure that their Annual Reports are updated and tabled before us, before the

completion date that is required. The Annual Report for 2021 have also been completed while the 2022 Annual Report have been approved by the Board in preparation for publishing. So, this organisation you will see has a very good measure of efficacy in their operation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to commend the work that has been put into the operations of PRB thus far by the CEO or the Head of PRB, Mr. Timoci Naleba and his management staff, and in the thought of diversifying the products from PRB, from just rental housing to actual ownership of residential housing, as well as some commercial development which is in line with the Ministry of Housing's proposal to provide for the rent to own housing opportunities. So far, the Ministry of Lands has issued a total of 79 leases for the development of affordable housing for low- and middle-income earners:

Public Rental Board - 14

- Northern Division – 2;
- Central/Eastern Division – 10; and
- Western Division – 2.

The People's Community Network (PCN) of course, we all know of the story in the Central Division, commonly known as the Lagilagi Housing;

Housing Authority - 57

- Northern Division - 4;
- Central/Eastern Division – 35; and
- Western Division – 18.

Housing Assistance and Relief Trust – 7

- Northern Division – 1;
- Central/Eastern Division – 5; and
- Western Division – 1.

These various sites where Housing and PRB are situated includes the Narere Barracks in Nasinu; Lagilagi Housing in Jittu Flats in Raiwai; Edenville in Turaki and Vesida/Kinoya, just to name are few.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry, as the need arises, is also able to identify idle and expired leases in cities and around towns which can now be reserved for the provision of expansion of affordable housing for the low- and middle-income earners to housing institutions such as, PRB and Housing Authority. Of course, there are some challenges as we all know.

There is a common challenge and issue which is the identification of low-income earners who are genuinely in need of this Government initiative in the provision of affordable and accessible housing. There are tenants living in these PRB flats or other flats built for low-income earners who have rented their flats, while others are offering them up for sale. There have been scenarios in which tenants are selling the flats at a very high cost. With its vision, the Ministry is always willing to assist the PRB in addressing common challenges that may contribute to social issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another issue is the issuance of development lease for housing purposes. Some of the long-term leases issued are sometimes being left undeveloped. When land are left undeveloped, they attract illegal squatting on that land. Therefore, it is always advisable for agencies, such as PRB to always comply with the conditions of the lease. Quickly develop, otherwise there will be a lot of challenges years later when you will try to do relocation of illegal occupants.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the current reality of our citizens needing affordable housing is evident in the increasing existence of informal settlements near our cities and towns. Majority of these prime State lands and if partnership with investors and stakeholders, as proposed in the Report are established to finance proposed housing estates.

Residents of these informal settlements can have improved living conditions with the proposed housing estate developed to its maximum potential. With the aim of providing affordable and accessible housing to our low-income earning bracket, with recreational spaces to curb crimes that are committed by our youths and children, providing security and wellbeing and backyard gardening spaces, it would be great to witness PRB meet its objective of being the leading provider of affordable, quality and appropriate rental properties for all of its customers. I support the motion that is before Parliament this afternoon.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank all honourable Members who have contributed to the debate on the motion before Parliament. The Committee had the opportunity to visit the various housing estates last year to examine the capital works that was carried out in this reporting year, and similarly the Committee's recommendations were derived from what the Committee had seen firsthand from this site visit. I have no further comments, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I just wish to stand and raise a Point of Order, Standing Order 74 and of course consistent with Standing Order 81 as well on clarification and for the purposes of Standing Order 32 on the record of the *Daily Hansard*. I need that to be corrected based on the Point of Order that was raised by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister concerning the shipbuilding industry. It was not FijiFirst that caused the demise of the shipbuilding industry. It is very mischievous of the honourable Minister to state that, but of course, it is a known fact that during the SVT days the shipyard or the shipbuilding industry, what was created then because it was sold off and that needs to be corrected.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want that to go on record in the *Daily Hansard* before it comes out tomorrow morning and that is the Point of Order that I want to raise to clarify that statement of fact.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions. Afternoon tea or early dinner is served, and I hope that you will have a good afternoon. I see some perplexed looks, in that case we adjourn, honourable Members. See you tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.23 p.m.