

**Commodore J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Public Service, People’s Charter and Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

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**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE KOROVUTO BRIDGE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Korovuto Tues. 2nd April, 2013
NADI 1500 Hours**

Salutations

Bula Vinaka and good afternoon to you all.

I am very happy to be with you in Korovuto to officially open the new Mate Road Bridge.

Today marks a new beginning for this community. Your old crossing was severely damaged after the 2007 and 2009 floods, which as we all know devastated the Western Division.

These floods – and the two last year – destroyed crops, homes and businesses. It also had a severe impact on the day to day lives of the Fijians living in this community.

The damage to the bridge was left unattended, and the people have suffered for it. When this matter was brought to my attention several months ago, I immediately understood the urgency of the problem.

This bridge is a life-line for the people who rely on it. It provides hundreds of Fijians access to towns and hospitals. It provides children access to schools. And it provides farmers access to markets.

In Korovuto, the main industry is sugar. The sugar cane growers rely on this bridge to transport their cane to Lautoka Mill.

To the sugar farmers here today:

I urge you to make the most of this bridge. Currently, the local productivity per hectare is low.

You need to work with FSC and the Ministry for Sugar to implement best practices, and possibly introduce new varieties of sugar cane.

Under the Sugarcane Industry Strategic Action Plan, our national target is 47 tonnes per hectare in 2013 and 70 tonnes per hectare by 2017. There is no reason that the farmers in this area cannot meet those targets with the right guidance, assistance and attitude. If we are focused and we remove the politics from sugar we can achieve these targets even sooner.

To all of you here today:

I urge you to look for new ways to make productive use of this new bridge, whether it’s opening up new land for sugar cultivation, commercially farming other crops or rearing livestock. The **$269,000** spent by Government is a small price compared to the many exciting new economic opportunities this bridge will afford you.

As I have said many times before, my Government’s most important task is to deliver better services to the Fijian people.

We all know how easy it is to make promises. For too many former politicians, promises were just words used to win government.

My Government is different. Whether it is building new schools, roads and bridges or fixing up old ones; whether it is providing new services or making the existing services run better; whether it is supporting the old industries that Fijians rely on for a living or helping create new ones.

Our commitment to the Fijian people is etched in each cinder block of that new school and paved in each meter of that new road or bridge. All these projects serve as visible reminders that we the Government are accountable to you the people.

As many of you may know, last week I announced the draft constitution for Fiji.

I am encouraged by much of the discussion and debate that has begun to take place, but I am also concerned by the efforts of some individuals and NGOs who are trying to misrepresent and mislead.

I encourage each of you to read the draft constitution for yourselves. You need to make up your own mind.

I am personally very proud of the draft constitution. For the first time in Fiji’s history it guarantees socio-economic rights for every Fijian.

What are these? These include rights to housing and sanitation, reasonable access to transportation, education, adequate food, clean water, a just minimum wage, social security schemes, health services and sanitation. And they also include specific rights for children and the disabled.

Day-to-day issues such as these were the focus of many submissions made by ordinary Fijians to the Ghai Commission. That is why I am so proud they are included in the draft.

This is your Constitution. It ensures that power lies with Parliament, which is elected and accountable to you the people. There is even a provision that allows for a referendum. None of Fiji’s previous constitutions has ever given so much direct power to the will of the people.

 It creates a Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission and an Accountability and Transparency Commission. None of Fiji’s previous constitutions has ever created such bodies to keep public officials, civil servants and parliamentarians accountable and create transparency.

These provisions together with others will enable the Constitution to stand the test of time and will make it an enduring foundation for a new Fiji.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would now like to thank all those involved with this project, including the team at the Ministry of Sugar and Returned Services League (RSL) and the Agro Development Corporation.

I would also like to acknowledge the many former members of the RFMF who worked on this project, whose commitment to the Fijian people has lasted even after their service has ended.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my great pleasure to officially open the Mate Road Bridge.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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