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Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, People’s Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

**OPENING STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT, TUESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2013**

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Narewa Village Mon. 12th August, 2013

NADI 1000 Hours

***Na Momo Levu na Tui Nadi kei na Delaniyavu Navatulevu,***

 ***Ratu Sailosi Dawai;***

***Our Development Partners;***

***Representatives of Civil Society Organisations Senior Government Officials;***

***Community Leaders;***

***Distinguished Guests;***

***Ladies and Gentlemen.***

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***Senior Government    Officials;***

***Community Leaders;***

***Distinguished Guests;***

***Ladies and Gentlemen.***

Cola Vina and a very good morning to you all,

For the second week in a row, I am in Nadi talking about climate change. First at the Pacific Islands Development Forum last week and now at the National Climate Change Summit here in Narewa.

Of all the possible venues in Fiji to hold these discussions, Nadi is undoubtedly the most appropriate. Because Nadi, in recent times, has been one of the areas most affected by the extreme weather events that the scientists say are becoming more frequent and severe because of climate change.

 The devastating floods here in March last year - and before that in January 2009 - mean that the people of Nadi don’t need to be reminded of the importance of this conference.

The impact of those floods was traumatic and the effects are ongoing, as we strive to modify the flow of the Nadi River to cope with future events and reduce the potential for disaster.

To the Tui Nadi and the people of Narewa, thank you for hosting this event -  the second  National Climate Change Summit, that brings together stakeholders from around the country

Ladies and Gentlemen, as a small nation, we plainly cannot influence climate change ourselves. We are not an industrialised country with high carbon emissions and can only try to persuade those that are to take decisive action to reduce those emissions.

It is clearly a global problem that requires global solutions. But rather than merely wringing our hands and telling the international community that “ something must be done”, we need to take charge of those areas we can influence.  And we are.

As in so many instances, Fiji is punching above its weight as we pursue alternative energy sources and reduce our one-billion dollar a year dependence on imported fossil fuels.

My Government is committed to meeting at least 90 per cent of our total energy requirements through renewable sources. Already 60 per cent of our energy needs are being met from renewable energy now that the Nadarivatu Hydro-electric Scheme is on line.

 We are also providing seven-year tax holidays for renewable energy companies willing to establish themselves in Fiji and have reduced to zero, the duty on renewable energy equipment.

So we are playing our part in the global quest for a more sustainable energy future.  While at the same time doing a lot more to improve our response to the effects of climate change, and especially the extreme weather events that have always been a part of our lives but are escalating in strength and frequency.

When Hurricane Evan struck us last December, we all marveled that such a destructive cyclone passed over us with no loss of life.  Yes, we thank God for our deliverance. But the relative lack of casualties was also the result of good planning – a national disaster management plan that worked. By moving our people from their flimsy homes to 300 relief centres around the country, we did everything possible to protect them from harm. And unlike some of our neighbours, Fiji was spared the funerals that have been a feature of far too many previous events.

We got it right last time and we are determined to get it right again. And we’re here in Narewa this week partly to ask ourselves how we can do it better.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on the wider issue of finally getting an adequate international response to climate change, I’m sorry to say that our options are much more limited.

Simply put, there is a lamentable lack of political will in those countries that are the big polluters to take the tough decisions needed to reduce carbon emissions.

The scientific consensus is that these emissions are pushing up global temperatures. The polar regions are melting and sea levels are rising. And as they go up, we are gradually being submerged. The situation in countries like Kiribati and Tuvalu is critical. Their very existence as nations is threatened. And in countries like Fiji, we are already moving whole villages out of the path of the encroaching waters.

As I have said before, it is the height of selfishness for the industrialised countries – the big carbon polluters – to put their economic interests before our survival. To them we say;  we didn’t cause this, you did. For heaven’s sake, face up to your responsibilities and do what the scientists say you need to do. Stop talking and start taking appropriate and decisive action.

Even in our own region, we are disheartened to see the lack of leadership being demonstrated by some of our neighbours. The current Australian Prime Minister – who is seeking re-election next month – once described climate change as “the greatest moral challenge of our time”. For once, I agreed with him about something (smile).  So it’s been very disappointing for Pacific Islanders to see Kevin Rudd and Australia generally back away from the tough emission targets that were once envisaged before it became obvious that these came with a political cost. We understand that Australia cannot be expected to operate in isolation itself. But it was missed opportunity, nonetheless, to demonstrate to those of us who are most under threat that Australia stands with us to meet this challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as Pacific Small Island Developing States, we have been obliged to confront this inertia by acting decisively ourselves. As you know, the PSIDS nations recently met in Nadi to begin formulating proposals to take to a wider global meeting of small island states in Samoa next September. And we are acting in concert at the United Nations to place climate change on the global agenda at every turn. We long ago came to the conclusion that individually, we cannot hope to achieve change. Only by using our collective strength and influence can we persuade the world of the absolute imperative for an immediate response.

To add more muscle to that effort, Fiji is forging yet another new alliance – between Pacific governments, civil society groups and business. The inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum in Denarau last week was an outstanding success and Fiji is delighted to be hosting its new Secretariat in Suva.  For the first time, the chorus of Pacific Governments pleading for a better global response has been joined by other representatives of the grassroots, in civil society and business.

Until now, these groups have been excluded from much of the decision- making process and especially the Pacific islands Forum. Now, they are an integral part of our deliberations, Pacific Islanders discussing Pacific solutions in the Pacific way – through consensus and compromise.

Collectively, we are asking the world to finally deal with the issue of climate change while meeting that challenge ourselves as best we can.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you all bring particular skills and experience to these discussions over the next five days, just as you did to the first National Climate Change Summit.  I wish you well in your deliberations and urge you to work in a holistic manner, bringing the various strands together to devise solutions that are innovative, practical and affordable and can be easily communicated and understood.

You can be sure of the Government’s full support as we work together on these challenges.  I certainly believe that we have demonstrated the will to do so in Fiji in a way that is sorely lacking at an international level.

So with those few words, I have great pleasure in declaring the second National Climate Change Summit open.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you.

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