

**Rear Admiral 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**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**PM’S SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE CONSTITUTION IN BRAILLE**

**Fiji School for the Blind Thurs. 3rd April, 2014**

**Nanuku Street, VATUWAQA 1000 Hours**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**The Attorney-General, Mr Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum,**

**The Solicitor-General,**

**The Trade Commissioner and Acting Head of Mission of New**

**Zealand,**

**The Executive Director of the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons;**

**The Board, Staff and Students of the Fiji School for the Blind;**

**My Fellow Fijians.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here today at the School for the Blind in Vatuwaqa to unveil the Braille version of the Fijian Constitution.

The importance of this initiative for those Fijians who are visually impaired – who can’t see properly - cannot be overstated.

For the first time, those of you who have learnt Braille can have access to the full contents of the supreme law of our nation, the law that governs us all.

You can read for yourself the new blueprint for Fiji that we launched with such optimism seven months ago and which is taking us to the first genuine democracy in our history on September the 17th.

You can read for yourself all the provisions of the Constitution: the common and equal citizenry that gives every Fijian unprecedented rights and opportunities; the secular state that provides everyone with religious freedom and the right to follow their own beliefs; the guarantee of a truly independent judiciary and our right to freedom of speech and expression; the rights of people with disabilities, including the visually impaired; the mechanics of our new-50 seat Parliament and how our elected representatives will be chosen; and of course the full spectrum of our rights and responsibilities as Fijian citizens.

This includes one of the most important facets of the Fijian Constitution - the unprecedented social and economic rights it guarantees; the right to economic participation; the right to proper education and health services, the right to adequate food and water; all this is in our Constitution and here in this wonderful new version - the version in Braille.

Why did we go to the trouble of making this version? Why did hundreds of hours and many thousands of dollars go into providing something for a relatively small segment of the population – just about one per cent of all Fijians? The answer is simple.

It’s because my Government believes that everyone, no matter who they are, deserves to have access to our Constitution. Not just to be told what’s in it but to read it for themselves.

To explore it, to be made aware of how our country will be governed, to have their own copy that they can read and re-read it whenever they want to do so.

This document belongs to every Fijian, no matter who they are or where they come from. It is inclusive. And no other Constitution in Fijian history has been widely available in anything other than the English language. Not the 1970 Constitution. Nor the 1990 and 1997 Constitutions, that were simply unjust, in that some Fijians were designated as being more equal than others, some people deserved more rights than others.

My Government was not only determined that the new Fijian Constitution should establish a level playing field for every Fijian once and for all. But we were also determined that it should be accessible to everyone. So we translated it from the English into the i’Taukei and Hindi languages and have distributed tens of thousands of copies across the nation. In doing so, this Constitution speaks to everyone. And today, my friends, it also speaks to you, those of you who cannot read conventional text but can read Braille.

It is, of course, your Constitution, as it is for every Fijian. For the first time, it specifically contains provisions guaranteeing the rights of Fijians with disabilities; the right to reasonable access to public places; access to public transport; the right to information, including the use of sign language for those hard of hearing and Braille for the visually impaired.

There are approximately eight thousand blind or visually impaired Fijians across the country. As I said, roughly one per cent of the population. Now you have the same opportunity that everyone else has to comprehend our blueprint for the new and better Fiji. And I hope that as you do so, you share my excitement about the future that lies ahead of us as a nation. Tall and proud in the world. Punching above our weight. Developing a clever country. Training our people for better lives for themselves and their families. Empowering every Fijian. Leaving no-one behind.

Today, we are launching Braille versions of the Constitution in English and iTaukei. A Hindi version is currently being prepared in India. And I want to extend my deep appreciation on all our behalf to the Royal New Zealand Federation for the Blind for making today possible.

Thanks to my Government’s partnership with our Kiwi friends, this is a momentous day for those of you who read Braille.

You have been empowered. You are now able to read and understand our Constitution that will chart our new course as one nation. As I’ve said to every other Fijian - seize this opportunity. Come with us as we build a new and better Fiji for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, children and my fellow Fijians, I now have the greatest pleasure in launching the Braille version of the Fijian Constitution in the English and iTaukei languages.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_