**

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**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

**SPEECH AT THE 2012 FIJI SPORTS AWARDS NIGHT**

**Vodafone Arena Fri. 26th July, 2013**

**LAUCALA BAY 1905 Hours**

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Distinguished Guests;

My Fellow Fijians:

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to be here tonight for the Fiji Sports Council’s Annual Sports Awards.

I will keep my comments brief this evening, because like all of you, I’m eager to see who the winners will be.

To the nominees: we are here to pay tribute to your achievement, your dedication to long hours of training, your determination and your will to win: whether coach, administrator, player, team or support staff.

To those who might fall short of the winning post tonight, we also convey our congratulations.  Because to make it here – to be among the best of the best - is an achievement in itself.

You all have shown discipline and commitment. Competing in a spirit of friendly competition, winning with humility, and losing with grace are all marks of a great athlete and sportsperson.

Tonight, we are also celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Pacific Games, which had their birth right here in Suva in 1963. We pay tribute to those who came before and thank them for the half-century of sporting memories they gave us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are a nation that loves its sports. They have the ability to lift our national spirit: like when Iliesa Delana won Fiji’s first-ever Gold medal at the London Paralympics; when our women took the bowl in the rugby world cup; when our men’s Sevens won in Hong Kong;  when Fiji took its fourth straight netball title; or when the Flying Fijians captured the Pacific Nations Cup.

When our team wins, our spirits soar. When our team loses, our hopes are dashed. We follow the fortunes of our favourite teams with eager anticipation and heightened nerves. We pledge them allegiance, relish in their victories, and stick with them even through the most bitter defeats.

Sports – at their various levels – give us a pride for ourselves, for our school, for our town or city, for our district, and for our nation.

And, of course, they are one of our favourite pastimes. Sport will be found in Fiji wherever there is a will and desire to compete: in parks, parking lots, school ovals and open fields.

But sports are not only important because we enjoy them, but because they encourage fitness, teach healthy competition and promote social cohesion.

That’s why my Government is increasing its investment and support in sport, especially among young people.

In Fiji, we share this commitment – to not only develop elite athletes that can compete on the world stage, but to set our children up for healthy, productive lives.

I'm happy to note that the new National Sports Commission – established by the 2013 Budget - is up and running, and has begun to oversee and co-ordinate sporting development throughout the country.

This year has also seen the opening of the ANZ Stadium. Never before have Fijians enjoyed such a magnificent venue as this. The new Stadium offers our athletes and spectators a world-class facility.

It enhances Fiji’s ability to bid for and host regional and international sporting events, and opens up new opportunities for the development of our young athletes.

But we’re also determined to give those living in rural and maritime areas access to the same kind of amenities which have only been available in the past to those living in our towns and cities.

So we’re targeting to build three integrated sporting facilities at Vunidawa, Seaqaqa and Rakiraki, followed by three more on Gau, Kadavu and at Korovou in Tailevu.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I would like to talk about the importance of unity, of us all working together to build our nation. Just as a sporting team can only win with teamwork, the same goes for our beloved Fiji.

This means no standing on the sidelines. It’s up to each of us to take a stake in Fiji’s future as we gear up for Fiji’s parliamentary elections next year, based on the idea of one person, one vote, one value.

I’d urge you all to think carefully about the kind of Fiji you want for yourselves and eventually your own children.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope you all have an enjoyable evening, and congratulations once again to all the nominees.

Before I finish, I have one more thing to do. It’s my great pleasure to present this year’s Prime Minister’s award to ….

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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