

Rear Admiral Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, CF (Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

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**SPEECH AT THE SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2014**

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**Novotel Fri. 17th Oct., 2014**

**LAMI 1800 hours**

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**His Excellency Hon. Anote Tong, the President of Kiribati,**

**Cabinet Ministers,**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**

**Chairman and Members of the Public Service Commission,**

**Permanent Secretaries,**

**Distinguished Guests.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

I’m delighted to be here this evening for these annual awards and especially in a year when we have such a distinguished guest speaker. His Excellency the President of Kiribati is a great friend of Fiji’s and it’s always a pleasure to spend time in his company. As you all know, he is in the front line of the fight to get the global community to confront the challenge of climate change and rising sea levels. In the case of Kiribati, the nation’s very survival is at stake. But we in Fiji are already facing some of the same challenges as we begin to move some of our coastal villages out of the way of the rising seas.

A new report released this week by the Australian National University paints a truly alarming picture of the fate awaiting Kiribati in particular but also Fiji and the other small island nations. Based on evidence collected across the world in the past two decades, the sea has risen 20 centimetres since the start of the 20th century because of global warming. They went back 35,000 years for this study, plotting the height of seas around the world at various times in our history. The rise since the start of the 20th century – 114 years ago – is as much as the rise for 6000 years before that. It is truly frightening and both our countries are in the process of being swamped by this deluge.

In the case of Kiribati – a nation of low lying atolls – the consequences are potentially catastrophic. Before long, Kiribati as we know it may cease to exist altogether.

And President Tong and I – along with other Pacific Leaders – have turned our minds to what we might have to do in a worst case scenario.

As many of you know, Kiribati has purchased a portion of land in Vanua Levu to ensure its long-term food security. But Fiji has said that we will not turn our backs on our friends in Kiribati in their hour of need. If their islands are eventually submerged, we are prepared to give them new homes here, with the assistance of the international community.

As it is, that may still be a few decades away. But tonight we renew our call on the World – and especially the industrialised countries - to take immediate action to reduce their carbon emissions, which are the principle cause of this warming. Once again during my recent visit to New York, I told the United Nations General Assembly that history will be very harsh on these countries if they selfishly insist on putting the health of their own economies before our survival.

Unfortunately, the reality is there is not much we can do beyond calling on the global community to face up to its moral responsibility towards us. But I can assure you, Your Excellency, that Fiji will stand shoulder to shoulder with Kiribati in this fight, along with those other nations that could also sink below the waves altogether. We look forward very much to hearing what you have to say to us tonight.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, as you all know, these awards are to recognise excellence in the Civil Service, those agencies and individuals who excel at serving the Fijian people, which is ultimately the task of all of us.

Tonight, we’ll be shining the spotlight on those who are role models for others and exemplify the best traditions of the Civil Service – dedication, efficiency, honesty, integrity, empathy and consideration for the ordinary Fijians you serve.

I want to congratulate all the winners and also say this: We want everyone else in the Civil Service to also achieve the standards you have set. We want the excellence that you exemplify to spread throughout the entire Government workforce. So that the Fijian Civil Service gets a reputation for being the best in the Pacific region and one of the best in the world.

To this end, my Government has already signalled that one of the main priorities in our new democracy is to reform the Civil Service to improve the overall standard of its service delivery to the Fijian people. We intend to do this methodically and well. And I have made it clear that we are going to work WITH the Civil Service as we make these changes, not against it.

I realise that there may be a degree of trepidation on the part of some civil servants about what we might be planning. That’s only natural, especially in a bureaucracy where the very idea of change tends to be resisted. People get used to the way things are and the way things have always been done, sometimes even when they recognise that those things might have outlived their usefulness. It’s human nature to resist getting outside your comfort zone. But I want to assure you all that we intend to do these reforms properly.

This is NOT a purge of the Civil Service. If you are doing your job well, you have nothing to fear. But we are going to work with you to make some changes so that you can do your job better. Improve standards of efficiency and service delivery. Streamline certain operations. Cut down on Red Tape. Oil the Government machine so that we all work better together and provide the Fijian people with the best possible service and return on their taxes.

The first stage of the process will involve an international group of consultants moving through the system and identifying areas in which we can do things better. Then will come the implementation phase – the changes. Some of it may be challenging but it will also open up new opportunities for many of you.

We want you to be more engaged, have more interest in your job and enjoy it more. And we want to open up new career paths, particularly in specialised areas, so that more of you can see a dynamic future in Government service. Those with specialised skills also deserve to be rewarded for them. So we intend to introduce different pay structures that recognise those skills and encourage others to acquire them. And of course, we want to keep our best and brightest people like our winners tonight, make it less likely that they’ll want to leave and attract more of the best people from the private sector.

So my message to you all tonight is: don’t fear change, embrace it. Because you will come to realise that it is good for you, good for the Civil Service and good for Fiji. It is part of our vision to transform ourselves into a modern and dynamic nation state and a genuine beacon of good governance in our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, all of you in this room are already contributing to that vision and tonight is a night to honour that contribution. To all the winners, congratulations. And to everyone, enjoy the rest of the evening.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.