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**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 DAWASAMU SECONDARY SCHOOL NEW CLASSROOM BLOCK**

Dawasamu Sec. School Thurs. 20h Feb., 2014

TAILEVU 1100 Hours

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**The Head Teacher of Dawasamu Secondary School,**

**Parents, Teachers and Students.**

Bula vinaka and a Very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be with you all in Tailevu North and deeply appreciate the warm welcome you have extended to me and my Delegation. It’s wonderful to be here and especially to see the faces of our young people, in whom we all have so much confidence about the future of our country.

I’ve been hearing about the improvement in the academic performance of the school, especially in Forms Six and Seven, and that’s something you can all be very proud of.

You will have heard me talking about the need for Fiji to become a smarter country so that we can get top dollar for our goods and services and improve our living standards. It all begins here, with you. As you know, we’ve eased the burden on your parents by providing free education in Fiji for the first time for primary and secondary school students. We’ve also introduced a tertiary loans scheme so that you can get a loan to pay for higher studies at a technical college or university. But it all depends on every one of you working as hard as you can and to the best of your ability. You need to grab the opportunity we have given you and run with it.

We’re here today to open your new classroom block and two staff quarters, which I’m delighted to say has been partly funded by my Office through the Small Grant Scheme in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the school itself.

Dawasamu Secondary School is one of the Educationally Disadvantaged Area schools identified by the Ministry, which recognises that until now, you have not enjoyed the same facilities at some other schools in Fiji.  This is something that my Government regards as simply unacceptable. So I’m delighted to be able to make this new investment to benefit young people from the 16 villages within the Dawasamu district.

Education is no longer a privilege in Fiji, as it used to be before my Government assumed office. It is now a right, a right enshrined in the new 2013 Constitution along with a range of other rights like access to health and clean water. These are now rights that cannot be taken away, no matter who is in power. As is the right of the i’Taukei not to have their land converted to freehold and sold off, as happened with previous governments.

As you all know, in eight days’ time I will be standing down as Commander of the RFMF to become a civilian and contest the upcoming 2014 General Election. I want to say something to the people of Tailevu about that election and the choice that everyone has before them. Do not look backwards and allow yourselves to be swayed by the same forces who have held our country back, who have manipulated ordinary people and spread division and discord.

Some of these old politicians are still with us, telling you that you will be better off voting for them. But if you think about it, they do not stand for your interests. They stand for their own. They want to restore their own privileges, to take our country backwards. I urge you all to embrace the vision of the new Fiji that I am offering, every Fijian working together to put Fiji First, to make Fiji great. Together, we can make Fiji a fairer nation, a nation in which every student at this school has a chance to fulfil their dreams.

I will be standing in this election on my record of delivering services to ordinary Fijians – free education, electricity, water – all those things that previous governments promised but failed to deliver.  This is my message to the nation: Don’t judge me on what I say but what I have done and will do. I will never make cheap promises – the kind you make to get what you want and trick people into voting for you. I want you to vote for me because I keep my promises - I do what I say. I deliver the things you deserve to make your life better, the things that are developing our nation and improving the lives of every Fijian.

So I appeal to the people of Tailevu to turn your backs on the politics of the past and join me in building a better future. We are doing so not for the benefit of the old elites but for every Fijian, whoever they may be and wherever they come from. By staying united, we can make Fiji great. By working together, we can build a better future not just for all of us here but the generations of Fijians to come.

This new classroom block is a symbol of that future – a place to learn and equip yourselves for a better life when you eventually leave here. Work hard. Use it well.

I now have great pleasure in declaring it officially open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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