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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**

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**SPEECH AT SAWANI VILLAGE SCHOOL OPENING A NEW CLASSROOM BLOCK AND TEACHER’S QUARTERS**

**Sawani Village Fri. 12th Sept., 2014**

**NAITASIRI 1000 Hours** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Head Teacher,**

**Members of the School Committee,**

**Teachers, Parents and Friends of the School,**

**Boys and Girls.**

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Members of the School Committee,

Teachers, parents and friends of the school,

Boys and Girls.

Bula Vinaka and a very Good Morning to you all.

First of all, I’m sure you’ll share my joy at the news that our 45 soldiers in Syria have been released. They are safe, they are well and we thank God that all our prayers have been answered.

People of every faith in Fiji prayed for these men and it has been a wonderful example of all of us of different faiths and denominations coming together.

I’m delighted to be here with you all in Sawani this morning to open your new classroom block and teacher’s quarters.

I deeply appreciate the warm welcome extended to me and my delegation and it’s wonderful to see all these happy and healthy faces in front of me.

I told an audience in Suva a few nights ago that whenever I feel discouraged about some problem or other, my mood always changes when I see our young people.

They are always so upbeat and welcoming and it reminds me why I am doing the job I do . To help these children achieve their dreams and fulfil their promise because they are our nation’s future.

Boys and Girls, I want you to know that there has never been a better time to be Fijian.

You are now enjoying the free schooling that my Government has provided, not only here in primary school but when you go on to high school.

FIJIFIRST AS A GOVERNMENT WILL extend this free education to the last year of preschool before children go into primary.

And students in class one from next year will all get 250 ml of free milk every day, because we want to build healthy bodies as well as healthy minds.

I want you all to work hard in primary school so that you can go on to high school and enjoy the free schooling there. This has made a huge difference to your parents, who no longer have to worry about finding the money for school fees.

But then after that, I want you to also think about going on to university or a technical college to learn the skills you need to become a doctor, a nurse, a farmer, a carpenter or any number of other things our country needs to power ahead.

If you work very hard, you can get a scholarship that will pay for this higher education. But even if you don’t, you can get a loan from the government to meet the fees and then pay it back after you get a job.

So never in the history of Fiji has it been easier for our young people to get an education or easier for their parents to afford it all.

When you leave school or graduate from university or a technical college, it is now also much easier to get a job because my Government has grown the economy and more people are investing in Fiji.

I keep saying the economy is like a big cake. The bigger we can make the cake, the bigger the slice we can all have in terms of the money we all need to live on and the services that the Government can provide.

My Government grew that cake by 4.6 per cent last year and we expect to grow it by a similar amount this year. So we are doing a good job of managing the cake – the economy - and making it bigger so that everyone can get a bigger slice.

As it gets bigger, there is more investment in Fiji and more jobs. As there are more jobs, there are more people paying tax to the Government. And we can use that money to provide you with more services such as education, electricity, water, health, better roads and better access to telecommunications.

That has been my Government’s most important achievement – to deliver services to the Fijian people to improve their lives and those of their families. To enable your parents to look after you better and give you the things you need.

So we deliver and we serve. And it’s very important that Fijians vote for me in the General Election next Wednesday to continue that record of service. If they vote for someone else who doesn’t know how to grow the cake, it could easier start getting smaller and we will all suffer.

My Government knows how to keep growing the cake. They don’t. So I’m asking Fijians to keep supporting me so that Fiji can continue to grow and all of you have better opportunities.

It annoys me when the people standing against me in the election say the i’Taukei are somehow threatened and we need to get rid of Bainimarama and his team so that the i’Taukei are better protected.

I am an i’Taukei myself. Why would I allow my own people to be threatened? And I believe that we have never been stronger or more proud so why do we need protecting? It makes us sound weak and helpless and insults as a people.

I want to tell you the facts, as opposed to the lies that are being spread by some of these people.

The i’Taukei own 91 per cent of the land in Fiji, got rid of some fancy legal footwork that people were using to sell off our I’TAUKEI land. That CAN NO LONGER HAPPEN BECAUSE THAT ownership is guaranteed under our Constitution, the supreme law in Fiji. The land cannot be taken away from us. And I have just put aside $10-million so that the Government can help I’Taukei landowners develop that land and make more money from it when they lease it.

The Constitution also guarantees that we can be Christians and follow Jesus Christ so there is no threat whatsoever to our religion.

There are also more i’Taukei in Fiji than any other segment of the population and more I’Taukei babies are born than any others. Those children will also live longer than ever because of our better health facilities.

Our language is also strong and every non-indigenous child now has to learn i’Taukei in primary school. It’s a compulsory subject.

And we all know that our culture and our traditions are thriving and Fijians are respected all over the world. So how are we threatened? The answer is that we are not. And these scaremongers are just trying to make you frightened about something you have no reason to be frightened about at all.

They are doing it for themselves. To trick you into supporting them. Don’t take any notice. They have nothing to offer you but fear. Whereas I am offering you hope. That if my Government is returned after the election, we can keep growing the cake, keep building a better Fiji so that every Fijian has a place and no-one is left behind.

Boys and girls, I want you to all think of yourselves as a team. Team Fiji. Every player looking out for the other. Everyone working together to score tries for our country and make it great. I ask you to love each other, look after each other, especially those who are weaker. And love our country because we live in the best place in the world and can make it even better if we stick together as one nation.

Work hard in your new classrooms, play hard on the sports field that we are going to upgrade for you next, and dream big dreams for yourselves and our nation.

It’s a wonderful time to be Fijian and seeing you all here today fills me with immense pride and hope for the future. And it is now my great pleasure to declare your new classroom block and the new teacher’s quarters open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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