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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 OPENING OF THE HATUNAVUTU KINDERGARTEN**

**Navutu Kindergarten Fri. 22nd Nov., 2013**

**SIGATOKA 1330 Hours**

The Executive Chairman of Fiji Pine Limited;

The Principal and Teachers of the Hatunavutu Kindergarten;

People of Navutu Village;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I’m delighted to be here today in Navutu – in the heart of Nadroga – to launch the new Hatunavuku Kindergarten and I appreciate how much it must mean to you all.

Every Fijian wants the very best for our children and unfortunately, what was here before was not up to the required standard.

Some of the ladies from Lomaiwai came to me asking if there was anything I could do as Prime Minister to improve the facilities here. So I took it upon myself to approach Fiji Pine Limited, which is part of your community, asking them to help.

I’m pleased to say that what you see here today is the result of that effort. Which is why it gives me even more pleasure than usual to be here with you today to celebrate what we can all do as Fijians if we work together.

Thanks to Fiji Pine Limited, we now have a wonderful revamped facility that the people of Navutu can be proud of and where your children can begin their life-long quest for knowledge.

You’ll have heard me talking recently about our vision to make Fiji a clever country. It begins here in kindergartens like this and extends through our schools, universities and colleges. But it should never end. Every Fijian, no matter how old, can keep educating themselves - which is why our Telecentres are so important by providing access to the Internet and the world of knowledge that is opening up for many people for the first time.

I think we can all agree that as a nation, we have to do a lot more for early education, to prepare our pre-schoolers better for those years that follow in primary school, secondary school and the tertiary system.

In the Budget – as you know – I announced that primary and secondary school tuition will be free in Fiji, for the first time, from 2014. The Government is currently ironing out the precise details to ensure a smooth transition for the start of the school year on January 21st.

But we’re also working on a plan to provide free early childhood education for those outside the private Kindergarten system. In the coming months, we’ll be conducting a needs assessment of Kindergartens across the country with a view to introducing tuition-free early childhood education in 2015.

So what you see here in Navutu today is what my Government would like to see everywhere in Fiji – a better start for our children along life’s path and a better future for them and our beloved nation.

The people of Navutu can be proud that their children are getting this better-start now. And we must all renew our commitment to give every Fijian child of pre-school age the same benefit as the months progress.

This has been a wonderful partnership between the people of Navutu and Fiji Pine Limited, which leases the land owned by the iTaukei for its operations and has entered a new era of co-operation with them for the benefit of every Fijian.

I especially want to thank Fiji Pine Limited and its Executive Chairman, Faiz Khan, for providing 18-thousand dollars to enable this Kindergarten to be upgraded.

This is just one of a host of initiatives that Fiji Pine Limited is undertaking under its social responsibility program to improve the lives of ordinary Fijians living in rural areas. This is in addition to the $1-million in development levies that it already pays.

I’m proud that my Government’s reforms at Fiji Pine Limited have produced a remarkable financial turn-around in its fortunes that has enabled it to step up this grassroots assistance.

Up to 2010, Fiji Pine Limited had incurred forward tax losses of 130-million dollars. This year, it has recorded a pre-tax profit of 3-million dollars and is paying income tax for the first time. And the profit of the Fiji Pine group as a whole – including Tropik Wood and Fiji Forest Industries - has been forecast to reach 15-million dollars.

I’m even more proud that our reforms mean that more of these profits can now be ploughed back into our communities through projects such as this.

It underlines my Government’s commitment to see every state-owned enterprise performing to the highest possible standard so that every Fijian benefits.

I’m sure that the people of Navutu, indeed the whole nation, will join me in saying: Thank you to the Executive Chairman for the commitment and dedication you and your team have shown. Thank you to every single worker at Fiji Pine Limited for your dedication and hard work.

I urge you all – state enterprise and the community – to continue to work together, not just for your own benefit but the benefit of the wider Fijian economy.

And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, today we focus national attention on a small Kindergarten in a relatively small village in Nadroga as part of our big vision for the future of our country.

It is a future in which every Fijian will have an equal stake and no-one will be left behind.

Together, we are working for a new Fiji, a better Fiji in which the youngest of our children can look forward to a lifetime of opportunity, as they grow up putting Fiji First and making Fiji Great for themselves and future generations.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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