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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 LAUNCH OF THE “FSC-SUGARS OF FIJI” BRAND AND OFFICAL OPENING OF FSC HEAD OFFICE**

Balawa Hill Fri. 2nd May, 2014

LAUTOKA 1500Hours

**The Attorney General and Minister of Industry & Trade,**

**Executive Chairman,**

**Members of the FSC Board,**

**Management and Staff of FSC,**

**Permanent Secretaries,**

**Sugar Cane Industry Representatives,**

**Invited Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

A very good afternoon to you all.

It’s a pleasure to be in the West again today to officiate at two very important events within the sugar cane industry.

This morning I was in Ba to release two new cane varieties, namely Qamea and Viwa. They, respectively, are high in sugar content and are tolerant to dry conditions.

I have no doubt that the cane growers would take kindly to planting these two varieties on the basis of these very positive characteristics.

Driving through from Ba this morning I could not help but notice the cane crop is generally looking good.

Now that the hurricane season is over and barring any freak storms between now and crush, I am optimistic that we should be able to harvest a better crop this year of about two million tonnes, and producing around 210,000 tonnes of sugar. The 2014 crushing season starts from mid-June onwards.

I had already announced on Friday, 28th March that the Fiji Sugar Corporation will assume the management of all harvesting and transport which is part of my Government’s efforts to relieve the cane growers of the burden of meeting this high cost item.

To this end the FSC has continued with the enhancement of the rail system to reduce transport cost through the purchase of 2 more locomotives from Queensland and 10 by 6-tonnes rail bins for trial. These could over time replace the existing 3 tonnes bins.

For improvement in harvesting, the FSC has purchased a large billet cane harvester and a smaller whole stick harvester.

My Government through the key industry stakeholders is engaging in tough negotiations for raw sugar export especially when the market price has fallen by some 22% in the EU market. Also they are seriously looking at alternative markets other than the EU.

The key sugar cane industry stakeholders are also looking at the possibility of establishing a “price stabilisation fund” to ensure a good return to the farmers with better long term predictable prices rather than relying on the present 70/30 percent sugar proceeds sharing formula.

Essentially, this would give stability and confidence to growers in particular and to industry stakeholders alike in investing in the Industry.

The FSC has made substantial capital investment in co-generation in its Labasa Mill and shortly in its Rarawai Mill. The combined outcome of these initiatives to the Fiji economy is less reliance on diesel fuel and lowering of the fuel import bill.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now let me turn to the reason we are here this afternoon.

You have just witnessed the handing over of the “Fijian Product Certificate” for our sugar by the Attorney General signifying a very significant milestone in our Sugar Cane Industry.

We have produced sugar for over 100 years but did not have a unique identity in terms of brand Fiji to it. This will change from today with the launch of the new brand that takes into account Fiji’s uniqueness through the earthy colours and the Traditional Masi design.

Interestingly enough, the designer’s grandfather worked for CSR here in Fiji and that brings a certain amount of history and tradition to the branding.

The construction of a new packaging plant for various retail packaging for both domestic and overseas markets will commence in Lautoka soon.

As part of the branding of our sugar as “Sugars of Fiji”, FSC will also change its branding to coincide with the sugar brand.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The second reason we are gathered here this afternoon is to witness the official opening of the new FSC Head Office.

Since relocating its Head Office from Dominion House, Suva to Western House, Lautoka in 1999, FSC has always dreamt of housing its Head Office on its own property.

The proposed site for which the ground breaking ceremony was held in 2009, opposite the Westpac Banking Corporation on Vitogo Parade, had to be aborted because the timing was not right relative to the weak and precarious financial position of the Corporation.

The development of these premises has lifted FSC and the Sugarcane Industry to another level in terms of image, commitment to its people and to the various farmers as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today’s ceremony makes me proud as Minister for Sugar in that, despite the observation and projection of Deloitte in September, 2010 that FSC will continue to record losses for the next seven years commencing from 2011; the FSC has recorded profits for financial year ended 31 May 2012 and again for financial year ended 31 May 2013.

This calls for celebration and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Fiji Sugar Corporation, its Board, Executive Management and Staff and industry stakeholders alike in making this happen.

On that note it is now my pleasure to launch the “FSC-Sugars of Fiji” brand; and also declare the new FSC Head Office, open.

Thank you and vinaka vakalevu.

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