

**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 OPENING OF FIJI MUSLIM LEAGUE SPORTS FEDERATION**

Ratu Cakobau Park Wed. 15th Oct., 2014

NAUSORI 1530 Hours

Bula vinaka and As salam wa leikum.

I’m delighted to be with you all in Nausori this afternoon and want to say a very warm welcome to all our friends and family from abroad who have come to make this tournament a success. Welcome back to Fiji, your true home.

Ni sa Bula Vinaka again.

This biennial event brings together the Muslims of Fiji and their friends and family members who live abroad. The FANCA Federation includes Fijians living in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America - those countries to which most Fijians have migrated.

The FANCA Tournament has been held every 2 years in different countries since then; allowing all of you to renew your friendships in a social and sporting environment. This year, at the 9th FANCA Tournament, we have more than 700 people visiting our shores and are delighted to have you back again in Fiji.

No matter where you have chosen to live, Fiji will always be your home. We are friends and family. And like all friends and family, our ties and our affection are not diminished by time or distance, but are reinforced and strengthened whenever we meet.

This tournament was conceived in 1995 as a way to bring together those who had migrated overseas to seek more opportunity and a better life for their children and grandchildren. Many of you had given up on Fiji.

You had lost hope that you could ever have an equal stake in our nation.

How times have changed….

Now hope has been restored. Because we have established once and for all that every citizen deserves the same rights and opportunities as anyone else. We have genuine equality. And for the first time, everyone is a Fijian. We all belong, no matter where we come from and whatever our beliefs. It is a wonderful time to be Fijian as we set our sights on a united future, with all the possibility that holds for us all and for future generations.

Fiji is being transformed today. It is not only back on the road to economic prosperity, it is rapidly becoming a society of opportunity and I would urge you all to look at your homeland with fresh eyes.  To consider coming back or at least taking out Fijian citizenship, which you can also now do without losing the citizenship of the country where you have settled.

We have had security and stability over the past eight years so the confidence of our citizens has been restored. But all sorts of opportunities now present themselves in the wake of our successful General Election, which the international community declared as credible, free and fair.

There’s a new spirit of optimism in the air. Confidence in our nation has never been higher. And neither has the confidence in our economy, which grew by 4.6 per cent last year and is in the throes of one of the biggest surges in our history.  There are all sorts of opportunities to invest and reap the rewards of doing so in the new Fiji. So I would urge you all to consider the opportunities available.

As you will have noticed, we are making a major investment in our infrastructure such as our roads. We have reformed our ports to tackle some of the bottlenecks that have held our exports back. Our telecommunications system is world class. There are all sorts of investment incentives, especially for new companies and for those willing to invest in certain parts of the country. And we have a workforce that is already educated but is destined to become smarter because of our education revolution. For the first time, every Fijian child is benefiting from our free schooling at primary and secondary level. And we are providing scholarships and tertiary loans to encourage more of our young people to go on to higher education.

We have a vision of a clever country cementing its place as the pre-eminent Pacific Island nation and taking its rightful place in the world. So Fiji is on the move and I urge you all to consider being part of it.

You might have found new homes elsewhere. But I invite all Fijians who have moved abroad to consider bringing back some of the wisdom and experience you have gained in the intervening years. We welcome your ideas and your energy, but most of all, we welcome you. After all, there is no place like home, especially when that home is Fiji, which is now finally, genuinely, the way the world should be.

I would like to re-echo the sentiments of the AG to have these tournaments held exclusively in Fiji, since the common factor that binds the FANCA family together is the link with Fiji.

It’s obviously very expensive for Fijian Muslims to take three teams from Fiji to North America, and many people simply can’t afford the expense. And we know you former Fijians are richer than us!!!. But it also gives all of you from overseas the opportunity to reconnect with your homeland and enjoy the famous Fijian hospitality. You may already be connected by faith but we want you all to keep your roots here because wherever you are, you will always be Fijian.

In that spirit, I wish to thank Team New Zealand, who graciously allowed this tournament to be hosted in Fiji, as it was 2 years ago. And we also hope that you will hold your 20th anniversary gathering here in Fiji in 2017.

On behalf of the Fijian people, I also want to pay tribute to the FANCA community for the assistance it has given to the Fiji Muslim League for disaster relief in Fiji. Charity is one of the five pillars of Islam. And your contributions to alleviate the suffering from the floods in the west and Hurricane Evan are deeply appreciated. Vinaka vakalevu.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is not a day for long speeches so in closing I wish you all the very best for the tournament and hope you all enjoy the many reunions that are taking place at this event. I also hope you take time out to see some of the rest of Fiji and to witness some of the great strides that your homeland has taken in the years since you left.

It’s a great day for all of you and another great day to be Fijian.

Shukria, vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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