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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 COMMISSIONING OF BIOFUEL PLANT IN GAU**

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**Qarani Village Sat. 16th Mar., 2013
GAU am**

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Salutation

The openings of the Gau Island Biofuel Plant here on Qarani marks another step by my Government to bring development closer to the people in order to enhance rural development, see to the full utilisation of our natural resources to create wealth and work towards eradicating poverty. This is the fourth (4th) mill to be implemented in Fiji after Koro, Cicia and Rotuma. The concept of the biofuel plant will be replicated across the rural sectors under the guidance of the Implementation Framework.

In developing this plant the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities, primarily through the Department of Energy had to work with the Native Land and Fisheries Commission, Land Use Unit and a number of stakeholders to help realize what we see today.

The global trend is that energy costs will continue to increase due to it being sourced from a diminishing reserve. With due respect to the above, the Department of Energy has designed a program that will not only commence towards making Fiji’s rural communities energy independent, and naturally well off, but also save the country huge amounts of money in buying imported fossil fuel. Currently our maritime communities face a lot of hardships in their everyday life, especially when the essential services and goods delivery do not reach their islands on time.

This biofuel program will also alleviate the need for ‘rural to urban’ drift because the main part of the biofuel project development will be implemented in the rural communities. The empowerment of rural communities, results from the local value adding of local agricultural raw materials, instead of exporting will lift economic activities, and in turn translate into a higher income and improved standard of living.

The use of copra, a widely available resource for the production of energy (biofuel) is a step in the direction of sustainable rural development and above all will provide the much needed dynamism into the rural economy. In addition to the final biofuel product, the milling of coconut oil can be transformed into cooking oil, body oil, and soap and copra meal – a by-product of the process which can be used as feedstock for livestock and as fertilizer. As technical solutions to most rural problems are being found, the linkages to the agricultural sector and socio-economic issues come to the fore.

The Fiji Government continues to forge ahead by way of positive initiatives that we have come to witness today. Similarly with the FEA we have continued to search for renewable solutions as we have done for Nadarivatu. It is hoped that such initiatives will also go a long way in providing the much needed awareness on the need to reduce global warming by reducing the use of the fossil and other imported fuels.

Also important, the concept is a step towards diversifying our energy supply and to become more secure with respect to our imports on fossil fuels. I am hopeful that by 2014 when we go to the polls we would have completed the economic transformation of the country where the rural dwellers will be fully participating in the economic development of the country by supplying the necessary resources in primary and secondary processed forms to the urban and overseas markets. The development of Fiji’s biofuel resources has the potential to give us a secure energy future.

The Gau Biofuel Project is expected to benefit the 16 villages of Gau, in terms of ensuring access to reliable and affordable ‘green’ fuel. Government has invested a total of close to $425,000 in the completion of this project and is a clear indication of the commitment of my Government to see developments in rural and maritime regions of the country. In the coming weeks, we will be commission a further five (5) such mills. These are in Moala, Matuku, Rabi, Vanuabalavu and Lakeba.

At this juncture I wish to thank the people of Gau for providing the support to see this project reach completion. In addition, I wish to thank the contracting company, Fortech Construction for the timely completion of the project. I believe such partnerships are important in this day and age and I once again wish to thank all those that have contributed in way or another in the realization of this important development in our country.

With those words, it is my pleasure to officially commission the Gau Biofuel Project.

Thank you, vinaka vakalevu.

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