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ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF KOROVISILOU STAFFING QUARTERS

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­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­Korovisilou Mon. 25th March, 2013

SERUA 1100 Hours

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Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

It’s wonderful to be in Korovisilou to open the new staff quarters for the local nursing station.

My fellow Fijians, I believe that service delivery is my Government’s most important task – to not just promise better access to health services, electricity, clean water, and roads, but to provide it.

My Government is not like previous governments who were all too eager to make promises to win support, but then who failed to follow through. Our promises represent more than empty words. They represent a firm commitment to deliver.

And with every step, we need to move further and further from the dishonest politics, the corruption and the divisions of our past.

Guided by a new Constitution, we need to continue to move towards a brighter future.

On that note, I am pleased to see that intelligent, thoughtful and vigorous discussion has already begun to take place on the draft Constitution announced last week.

In the next few days, we will also be publishing explanatory notes on each section, laying out what they mean, in order to make it more understandable for ordinary Fijians.

People who believe in good governance, equality under the law, an independent Judiciary, individual liberty, guarantees against state power, and political, civil and socio-economic rights will find much to admire in the draft Constitution.

This is a Constitution for a new Fiji, a Fiji in which the rights of everyone are protected irrespective of the economic status, religion, age or gender.

You might notice, for example, that many of the provisions of the Ghai draft that dealt with women separately have been removed - including that which required a certain number of women to be on a political party’s list of candidates. As a nation we need to encourage more women to get involved in the upcoming elections. But the Constitution should promote equality in all forms, not encourage division of any sort.

You might also note that the draft constitution has not included so-called entrenched provisions. This is because no law should be above parliament, because parliament represents the voice of the people. But this does not mean that property or land ownership will not be protected.

In fact, my Government has given more protection to iTaukei land ownership than ever before. These new laws that we have introduced are practical, effective, fair amongst members and further guarantees the absolute protection of the rights of the iTaukei not to have their land alienated from them. All of these laws have been introduced without the so called entrenched provisions of the past.

Please do not be misled by certain politicians and NGOs that are trying to sow the seeds of fear and mistrust. This is the sort of old politics that we must not allow to creep back into our national dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the things I am most happy about is the inclusion of socio-economic rights in the draft constitution for the first time in Fiji’s history. Rights to housing and sanitation, reasonable access to transportation, education, adequate food, clean water, a just minimum wage, social security schemes, health and sanitation. And there are specific rights for children and the disabled.

As we saw in many of the submissions to the Constitutional Commission, these are the issues that matter most in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. For Fijians, nothing is more important than having these rights protected in the new constitution. For my Government, nothing is more important than making sure these rights are upheld and these needs are provided for.

That is why – after opening a brand new health centre in Bua and an extension to an existing health centre in Rabi two weeks ago – I am so pleased to be here to open the new staff quarters for the Korovisilou Nursing Station.

The Korovisilou Nursing Station was last upgraded in 1965 to cater for the increase in population after the new highway was built through this area. Since then, this station has made crucial health services available locally.

But 1965 was a long time ago, and the needs of the 3 nurses who work here and the community members who are treated here have changed.

There were no staff quarters to house the nurses. This was not only an inconvenience for them, but it was also a real problem during emergencies when there was no one here and urgent care was required.

So Government has invested more than $325,000 to build a new duplex to provide adequate housing for these nurses who play such an important role in Korovisilou.

And, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is just the beginning. Our plan is to continue to upgrade the Health Centre to meet the needs of the growing population here.

With these words, I would like to thank all those involved in this project, and especially the nurses who serve this community.

I now have great pleasure in declaring the new Korovisilou staff quarters open.

Vinaka vakalevu.

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