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**SPEECH AT THE LAUTOKA HOSPITAL EXTENSION AND REFURBISHMENT OF EMERGENCY DEPT AND THEATRES**

**Lautoka Hospital Thurs. 7 August, 2014**

**LAUTOKA 1100 Hours**

**Cabinet Ministers;**

**Distinguished guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Bula vinaka and good morning to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to be here today for the launch of the extension and refurbishment of the emergency department and operating theatres at Lautoka Hospital.

Since construction in 1974, this facility has never gone through such a major renovation. And it’s beginning to show. Over past few years, the need for these upgrades has become increasingly apparent as the demand for emergency and surgical services has steadily risen. An increase in NCDs amongst our population, an increase in tourist arrivals, and an increase in the number of referrals from neighbouring Pacific countries have all added to the stress on the current facility, which is already hard pressed to meet the needs of the growing local population.

People in the Western Division know that there is a serious problem with surgical waiting times at the moment. Currently, when visiting surgical teams are in the country – though the provide crucial and much-appreciated services – they put a strain on resources which means that elective cases get pushed down the schedule, often leading to long waits.

But all this will change when the upgrades here are complete. The goal is to create a world-class hospital that offers the highest, internationally-recognised standards of care and emergency treatment, so that Fijians receive the same quality of service found overseas.

Indeed, the new facilities will be constructed up to World Health Organisation standards and will include a brand-new emergency department and 4 new operating theatres, bringing the total to 7. One theatre will be designated for Cardiac surgery, one for Orthopaedics and one for Neurology cases– all equipped with the latest technology. The result will be quicker surgical turnaround for patients across Fiji, more theatres for visiting doctors, and hopefully, a boost to the tourism industry as investors and travellers alike gain peace of mind knowing we host a world-class emergency facility next door to some of our biggest resorts.

The total project represents an investment of **$12.6 million.** The tender for the construction has been awarded and work is expected to be complete before the end of next year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will hear a lot of promises made by would-be politicians about health in the lead-up to the General Election in September. They are already saying that more needs to be spent on health, just as they say more needs to be spent on just about everything else without ever saying where the money will come from. Indeed many were in government or parliament previously but had done nothing.

I have been frank with the Fijian people about what we can and cannot do in the health care area. That is because for many years there has been very little investment in our health system. In other words there has been no long-term vision or goal. We are starting from the basics in many areas in the public health system.

Notwithstanding that, in the past six years, my Government has created thousands of new jobs for doctors and nurses in the Ministry. We’ve increased the number of medical professionals being trained in Fiji and overseas. We have invested millions of dollars in new medical equipment. And all over the country, we have set up new health care clinics, with increased operational hours and with an emphasis on delivering services to all Fijians whether in the urban or peri-urban areas or in remote rural and maritime areas.

But if any Fijian still needs convincing of just how seriously we take our responsibility to improve Fiji’s health services, I would tell him or her to look no further than the past week. Last Wednesday, I was in Navua opening a brand-new state of the art hospital; yesterday, I was in Ba breaking ground on new hospital being built as the result of a groundbreaking public-private partnership; and today, I am in Lautoka to launch this massive capital project.

On top of this, other capitals works planned in the Lautoka medical boundary include the construction of a diabetic hub centre and renovations at the Kamikaca Park Health Centre.

Of course we need to also ensure that apart from the capital investment we need to ensure and train our doctors, our nurses and our other heath service providers to become more sensitive to our citizens, to the patients. They must treat all patients with respect, dignity, sensitivity, compassion and without discrimination.

All told, no other government has ever made the level and manner of investment that we have made and are still making, in such a short period of time, to deliver a better standard of health care in Fiji. And this is just the beginning of what Fijians will witness in the coming years if our health reforms continue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With those words, it’s now my pleasure to do the much-awaited ground breaking for the Lautoka Hospital extensions.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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