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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

PRIME MINISTER’S NEW YEARS ADDRESS

**Office of the Prime Minister** **Tuesday 31st of December, 2013**

**SUVA 6pm**

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BULA VINAKA AND A VERY GOOD EVENING

MY FELLOW FIJIANS 2014 IS THE MOST AUSPICIOUS AND PROMISING YEAR IN THE HISTORY OF FIJI.

AS WE BEGIN THIS NEW YEAR, WE CAN TAKE ACCOUNT OF HOW FAR WE HAVE COME…IN THE PAST YEAR WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED MUCH TOGETHER… …YOU SPOKE, AND WE LISTENED.

 …WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED OUR NEW CONSTITUTION, A FOUNDATION FOR OUR NATION THAT GUARANTEES ALL FIJIANS MORE HUMAN RIGHTS THEN EVER BEFORE. IT GURANTEES EQUALITY. IT IS INCLUSIVE OF ALL, AND UNITES US ALL AS A PEOPLE, AS ONE NATION.

OUR CONSTITUTION PROTECTS AND GUARANTEES LAND OWNERSHIP; IT PROTECTS THE RIGHTS OF TENANTS; GIVES FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC; IT SETS NEW STANDARDS OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS. AND IT GIVES OUR YOUTH A VOICE.

WE HAVE DEDICATED OUR SELVES TO BEING AN EDUCATED AND KNOWLEDGE BASED NATION. WE ARE INVESTING AN UNPRECEDENTED AMOUNT IN EDUCATION… INVESTING IN FIJIANS…INVESTING IN OUR YOUTH…FOR FIJI…FOR OUR FUTURE

PRIMARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION IS NOW COMPLETELY FREE. PARENTS AND FAMILIES NO LONGER HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT HIDDEN EDUCATION COSTS. ALL OUR YOUNG FIJIANS WHETHER THEY ARE RICH OR POOR OR LIVE IN MARITIME OR RURAL AREAS WILL NO LONGER HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT PAYING FOR THEIR TERTIARY FEES UPFRONT.

MORE AND MORE STUDENTS AND ADULTS LIVING IN RURAL AREAS HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONES. MORE FIJIANS ARE CONNECTED DIRECTLY TO THE REST OF THE WORLD THAN EVER BEFORE.

AS WE BEGIN 2014, CLEAN WATER AND ELECTRICITY ARE FLOWING INTO MORE HOMES. THIS WORK WILL CONTINUE INTO THE NEW YEAR BECAUSE WE WANT EVERY FIJIAN CONNECTED.

THE WORK OF THE MINISTRIES OF MY GOVERNMENT AND OUR PUBLIC SERVANTS ARE FOCUSED AS NEVER BEFORE—AND BEING HELD ACCOUNTABLE-- ON PROVIDING FIJIANS WITH THE SERVICES THEY’RE ENTITLED TO. ENSURING THAT PROCESSES THAT USED TO TAKE MONTHS ARE NOW STREAMLINED.

WORKING WITH EACH OTHER AND FOR EACH OTHER HAS TAKEN US TO FIJI’S MOST CONFIDENT AND FORWARD LOOKING ERA.

OUR ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE IS VERY STRONG. THERE IS NEW INVESTOR CONFIDIENCE AND AS RESULT MORE JOBS ARE BEING CREATED. WE ARE HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION; THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT THAT.

FIJI IS NOW IN A STATE OF CONSTANTLY BECOMING A BETTER COUNTRY.

…AND TOGETHER… WE YET HAVE MUCH TO DO. MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, DELIVERING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY.

ON THIS FIRST DAY OF THE NEW YEAR, WE STAND AT THE DOOR STEP OF OUR PARLIAMENT UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION... …AND NOW THE FUTURE BELONGS TO YOU.

THE OLD DAYS OF A SINGLE LOUD VOICE DICTATING THE VOTES OF MANY ARE OVER.  PERMANENTLY.  FROM NOW, EACH AND EVERY FIJIAN IS FREE TO VOTE WITH THEIR MINDS. THE ONLY AUTHORITY TO OBEY IS YOUR OWN CONSCIOUS.

ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE, ONE VALUE.

YOU MUST GRASP OUR FUTURE WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT. IT IS YOUR HANDS THAT WILL STEER FIJI ONWARD.

WITH THIS NEW DEGREE OF TRUE POLITICAL FREEDOM AND HOPE COMES A NEW LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY.

VOTERS THEMSELVES ARE OBLIGED TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT WHO TO VOTE FOR.

MY FELLOW FIJIANS… …PLEASE DO NOT TAKE THESE DECISIONS LIGHTLY. BEFORE THE ELECTION, VOTERS MUST EDUCATE THEMSELVES AND ASK QUESTIONS OF THOSE STANDING FOR OFFICE…

…ABOUT THE CANDIDATES’ POSITIONS ON THE ISSUES, LEARNING THEIR TRACK RECORDS, LISTENING CAREFULLY TO THEIR PROMISES, KNOWING WHETHER THEY HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DELIVER OR NOT… … AND WEIGHING THEIR SINCERITY AND HONESTY.

THIS IS ESSENTIAL.

IN ORDER TO CHOOSE THE BEST GOVERNMENT, THE VOTERS MUST PREPARE.  … …AND IF THEY DO, THEY WILL GET IT RIGHT.

EACH VOTER MUST CONSIDER FOR THEMSELVES THE MAIN QUESTIONS:

WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

WHAT IS THE BEST PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF FIJI?

WHOSE PLAN WILL MAKE FIJI STRONG AND MODERN?

COMING IN TO THIS ELECTION YEAR, WE ARE BEGINNING TO SEE THE CHOICES AHEAD. FIJI NOW HAS FOUR REGISTERED POLITICAL PARTIES, AND I WILL FORM A FIFTH IN THE COMING MONTHS. THERE MAYBE OTHERS.

THE DIFFERENT POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE THE GRAVEST RESPONSIBILITY—TO CONDUCT THEMSELVES IN AN HONEST NO-NONSENSE APPROACH TO THE ELECTION AND TO THE FIJIAN PEOPLE.  THE POLITICS OF THE PAST ARE UNACCEPTABLE.

EACH PARTY… …EACH CANDIDATE MUST SEND THEIR MESSAGE TO THE FIJIAN PEOPLE AND BE CLEAR:

—WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?

----HOW DO WE SEE THE FUTURE OF FIJI? WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES?

----HOW WILL WE BE OF SERVICE TO ALL OF THE FIJIAN PEOPLE?

----WHAT WILL WE DO TO MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR ALL FIJIANS?

----HOW WILL WE MODERNISE FIJI?

NEGATIVE POLITICAL AND PERSONAL ATTACKS AND DISTORTING THE FACTS ARE CORROSIVE AND MANIPULATIVE AND HAVE NO PLACE IN THE ELECTION OF 2014. AS I SAID A MOMENT AGO, THE DISEASED POLITICAL BEHAVIOR OF THE PAST IS, AND MUST BE OVER AND DONE WITH.

FIJIANS DESERVE A POSITIVE CAMPAIGN ON THE ISSUES.  AND FIJIANS MUST DEMAND IT.

AS FIJIANS GO TO THE ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR, THEY CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT THEIR VOTE WILL COUNT, AND THAT THE FRAUD OF THE PAST WILL BE PREVENTED.

OUR NEW ELECTION SYSTEM IS AND WILL BE TRANSPARENT AND THE STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES PROVIDE FOR A HIGHER DEGREE OF INTEGRITY THAN EVER BEFORE.

A RECORD NUMBER OF FIJIANS HAVE REGISTERED TO VOTE IN THIS YEAR’S ELECTION. ALMOST 540 THOUSAND SO FAR… …AND THERE WILL BE EVEN MORE AS WE CONTINUE TO REACH OUT FAR AND WIDE… …ALL OVER FIJI AND OVERSEAS… …SO THAT EVERY FIJIAN WHO WANTS TO HAVE A SAY IN OUR FUTURE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN THE ELECTION OF 2014.

AND TO THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET REGISTERED TO VOTE, I URGE YOU ALL TO DO SO.

IN THE YEAR AHEAD, EACH ONE OF US NEED DO OUR PART—FOR ONE ANOTHER… …FOR OUR CHILDREN AND FOR OUR COUNTRY---TO USHER IN A NEW ERA OF PARLIAMENTRAY DEMOCRACY, OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY. TO MAKE THIS OUR REALITY WILL REQUIRE THE ENERGY AND EFFORT OF ALL FIJIANS.  I AM GIVING IT MY TOTAL COMMITMENT.

WE MUST LOOK FORWARD AS WE WALK THROUGH THAT DOORSTEP TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY. THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS, AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THERE ARE GREATER THINGS AHEAD FOR FIJI.

MY FELLOW FIJIANS, I WISH YOU ALL AND YOUR FAMILIES A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR, A VERY HAPPY 2014.

VINAKA VAKALEVU, THANK YOU.

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