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**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 OPENING OF EXTENSIONS TO THE VATUWAQA PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Vatuwaqa Primary School Thurs. 13th Feb., 2014

Ratu Sukuna Road, SUVA 1400 Hours

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**The Headmaster and Staff of the Vatuwaqa Primary**

 **School;**

**Boys and Girls.**

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to be here today to open these extensions to the Vatuwaqa Primary School and to see so many bright young faces.

There are 301 of you on the school roll – 150 boys and 151 girls. I keep saying that we need more gender equality in Fiji and it’s pretty hard to get more equal than that!

So this is really something to celebrate – a school that’s a symbol of the equal importance of boys and girls in the new Fiji we are building.

We want you to all have the same chance to get on in life, whether you're a boy or a girl, wherever you come from or whatever your parents do.

Most of you will come from families where your parents have to work very hard to earn a living and get the money they need to look after you.

I understand that life can sometimes be a struggle, which is why this year, my Government provided free schooling in Fiji for the first time.

Instead of having to scrape up the fees to send you here, your mothers and fathers or uncles, aunties or grandparents can now spend that precious money on other things to make your lives better.

All over Fiji, a big burden has been lifted on ordinary families. It doesn’t matter how poor you are now. Children like you can go to school and learn all the things you need to get on in life – to read and write, to add up, to learn about the world around us.

Now that we’ve been able to do this, what I want you to do is to work hard at your studies and make the most of the chance you’ve been given.

At your age, you can be anything you want if you’re prepared to work for it. So as your Prime Minister, my job is to help you get there.

Never forget that you are the future of Fiji. If you do well, we all do well. And we all need to work together, to support each other, to think of ourselves as Team Fiji, to put Fiji first.

I want to ask you children today – and every child around Fiji - to do something very important for me and the country. As some of you will know, mosquitoes are carrying a disease called dengue fever. It is making a lot of people very sick and some have even died. Our Health Ministry tells us that there are 2,137 people who have dengue but we think there are about 4,500 people who have Dengue. Many people don’t go to the doctors.

These mosquitoes breed in still water. That water can be in a bucket, a plastic container, or anything that can hold water for any length of time. We have to hunt down anything with water in it where these mosquitoes can breed.

You might have seen the new advertisement on TV telling everyone about this disease and what to do. You need to put on some kind of mosquito repellent so the mozzies don’t bite you when you go out. Ask your parents to get you some if you don’t already have it. Sleep under a mosquito net if you can. Get your parents or an older brother or sister to light a coil. But I also want you to join in the hunt for those places where the mozzies are breeding and hiding. Go into your own backyard and make sure there’s no water in anything. Get together with your friends and track down these places where the mosquitoes are coming from, carrying this terrible sickness. Clean up around the house. Remove containers, coconut shells or rubbish that hold water. Empty your pot plant trays, empty the water out of old tyres, household rubbish or tarpaulins. Make sure your parents keep the gutters clear and the grass cut. The whole country needs to get together to fight Dengue Fever before this outbreak gets worse.

Finally, I want to thank everyone involved in building these wonderful new facilities – the new school hall, the canteen, bathrooms, playgrounds, fences, gates, pathways, everything. The Vatuwaqa Primary School has been here for 80 years, much longer than your parents and even your grandparents. It’s better now than it’s ever been and you can all be extremely proud to be part of such a great school.

I’m very proud that my own office was involved in this project. I’m especially proud that the Engineers from our army – the RFMF – have done so much work to give you children and your teachers the buildings and other things you see all around you today. Some of you may know that as well as being Prime Minister, I’ve also been the Commander of the Military for the past 15 years. I’m very proud of my soldiers. Some of them are overseas keeping the peace in parts of the world where there’s been fighting and ordinary people aren’t safe. And some of them are here in Fiji working on projects all over the country to make the lives of Fijians better.

In just over two week’s time, I’ll be standing down as Military Commander so that I can stand for the general election that we are having in a few month’s time. I’m asking everyone to support me in that election so that I can continue to be Prime Minister and keep working hard to make Fiji a better place. The rules say I’ve got to give up my Military job if I want to stand for Parliament and that’s what I’m going to do.

I’m leaving a job I love but it’s time to move on. I just want to say as I get ready to make the move how proud I have been to lead our soldiers and sailors for so long.

Thank you to all of you who have worked on making this great school better. Thank you to the staff for your dedication. Thank you to the parents and the rest of the community for providing the support that every school needs.

As I keep saying, these are great days to be Fijian. And if we keep going as a nation the way we are, even greater days lie ahead.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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