

**Rear Admiral J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil),OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

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**SPEECH AT OPENING THE 2015 BUDGET FORUM**

**Grand Pacific Hotel Sat. 4th Oct., 2014**

**SUVA 0900 Hours**

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**The Honourable Minister for Finance,**

**Honourable Cabinet Ministers,**

**The Governor of the Reserve Bank,**

**Members of the Private Sector and Civil Society Groups,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be back in Fiji in time to open this important Forum leading up to the 2015 Budget next month.

As I told the United Nations General Assembly last week, I intend to run an inclusive Government in which the needs and concerns of every Fijian are taken into account when formulating our policies.

So it’s a great pleasure to see so many of you accepting the Minister of Finance’s invitation to provide your input as we decide the Government’s spending priorities for the year ahead.

As you all know, it’s a momentous time in our nation’s history and a wonderful time to be Fijian. On Monday, our Parliament will sit for the first time in eight years in the very spot where the tragic cycle of instability that has scarred our nation began back in May 1987.

When we gather in the refurbished Chamber across the road, it will be a hugely symbolic occasion. Part of our reason for moving Parliament back into the Government Buildings was to bring history full circle.

Where our previous brand of democracy was halted by gunmen on that fateful morning 27 years ago, we will meet again as representatives of the people chosen in the first genuine democratic election in Fiji’s history.

We intend as we gather on Monday to put a full stop to the years of wasted opportunity and embark on a new era in which working together, we move our nation forward. To fulfill its promise. To fulfill its destiny.

Which is why you are all here this morning. To join me and my Government on this great mission, to come with us on our journey over the next four years to really make a difference in our national life for the sake of every Fijian.

No matter who you are, where you come from, what industry or organization you represent, or who you voted for, you are all important to this Government.

We are all cogs in a great machine – the machine of running a nation. And only by working together in tandem, each of us playing our part, can that machine achieve its maximum capacity and output.

In a moment, we’ll be getting a tour of the economic horizon from the Governor of the Reserve Bank. Without wanting to steal his thunder, I can say that never before has Fiji had so much potential for growth.

We’ve already had a couple of great years in which government expenditure, especially on new infrastructure, has been accompanied by significant private investment as confidence in Fiji grows.

But having now successfully conducted a credible, free and fair election – and having it acclaimed as such by the global community – our position can only get better.

On my overseas trip and especially in my meetings with world Leaders at the United Nations, I found a huge level of enthusiasm about Fiji’s future prospects. Having embraced a united future and buried the divisions of the past, the world is expecting us to take off.

We have so much going for us; our glorious natural surroundings; our wonderful people; our central position as a hub in the Pacific; an eager and talented workforce destined to become even smarter because of our investment in education; the many reforms we have made to transform Fiji into a modern nation-state; and on top of all of this, our transition to a genuine democracy, not the pale imitation we had before. All this means that Fiji has never stood taller or had so much potential.

I have asked my opponents in the Parliament to work constructively with me to capitalise on these positive indicators. Whatever our differences, we must share a common vision of a better Fiji and we owe it to the Fijian people to work as hard as we possibly can in their interests and in the interests of our nation.

We must also work together to capitalise on the renewed confidence in Fiji that has accompanied both the election and our comprehensive reform program over the past eight years.

Those reforms have improved our standards of governance and made Fiji more competitive but there is still much to be done.

While some may only focus on the 2015 Budget, I urge you all – however - to cast your eyes further, to start thinking more about where we need to place ourselves as a nation over the next four years and beyond. We need a smarter, more strategic and more integrated approach from every sector.

An example: If, as expected, the surge in our economy produces a construction boom, do we have a workforce with the skills necessary to cater for that boom? Are developers and employers liaising with our universities and technical colleges now to make sure our young people are being trained for those positions down the track?

Our new democracy is bound to open up new avenues and opportunities and we must seize them. So we intend as a Government to redouble our efforts to streamline our economy, improve its performance, attract new investment and create the jobs on which the prosperity of many of our people depends.

In the coming months, a large part of our focus will be to reform the public sector, which needs to be restructured and modernized.

Our Civil Service needs to keep up with the demands of a modern economy, not be a prisoner of a mindset that says: *“This is the way it is done because this is the way it has always been done”.*

We need to put the service back into the Civil Service. It needs to be more responsive to the public. The process of Government needs to be more service-orientated and efficient, whether it is obtaining a fishing licence or a duty concession.

Working with the Civil Service and not against it, we intend to promote a culture of excellence at all levels. And we intend to improve Civil Service pay and conditions so that we can attract the best and brightest people to Government service. I urge all civil servants to embrace the changes that are coming, not fear them. Because as well as improving efficiency, they are designed to make your jobs more satisfying and rewarding.

Ladies and Gentlemen, with the election behind us, we must continue to focus on economic growth for the benefit of all Fijians.

I appeal to all of you in this room: Let us resolve here and now to work hand-in-hand to crank up the machine, to get us powering ahead. To join hands to help achieve our vision of Fiji as an economic powerhouse in our region. And in the process to empower the lives of every Fijian.

We’re asking for your input at this Forum to help us formulate not only the 2015 Budget but our development plan for the future. We value that input. As a Government, we have the *FijiFirst* manifesto that will underpin our development plan.

But this is again your opportunity to put forward your own ideas and I urge you all to take it.

Thank you all for coming.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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