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

**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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ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE FRCA CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTRE, RAKIRAKI

R**akiraki Fri. 25th Jan., 2013**

**RA 1100 Hours**

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**FRCA Board Members;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a good morning to you all.

It is a pleasure to be here this morning to open Fiji Revenue and Custom Authority’s (FRCA) new Customer Services Centre in Rakiraki.

It was only a month ago that this area faced the wrath of Tropical Cyclone Evan. This cyclone affected thousands of families in this area and caused a great deal of sorrow.

But I am proud that we stood together throughout these difficult times. Now, we are working together to rebuild. So it is no small achievement that today we are here to witness the opening of the FRCA Rakiraki Customer Services Centre.

It is a sign of resilience, and it is symbolic of the fighting spirit of the people of Ra.

When I opened the Rakiraki Legal Aid Office two months ago, I said that my Government is committed to providing services to all Fijians living in all parts of the country, not only those living in large cities and towns.

This Government is a government for all people. With this in mind, I instructed FRCA to make their services easily available to Fijians living outside of the main urban centres. They have done that through the opening of this office and, later today, an office in Sigatoka.

Now, you do not have to travel as far as Lautoka for FRCA services - its right here on your doorsteps.

By spreading more Government services into more communities, we hope to remove barriers for growth and development and encourage economic growth

Rakiraki and the Ra Province have huge economic potential. The sugar industry has long been the economic mainstay of this area. But now a number of industries, such as tourism and non-sugar agriculture including dairy, are emerging and that will bring new opportunities and important diversity to the economy here.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stated in my 2013 Budget Announcement, my Government will push relentlessly for equality of all Fijians.

Our overall aim is to modernise and streamline all the instruments and institutions of Government.

But this is not just a job for government; it is a national endeavour. It benefits all Fijians, and it is important that you all participate, that each Fijian adds his or her grain of sand to the effort. How can the average citizen help? You can help us to help you by paying your taxes and customs duties in full and on time.

We have lowered taxes and reduced duty rates on a number of key imports to make sure that our tax and revenue system is fair and affordable.

This year, we are going to further liberalise and simplify our tax system and continue our efforts. I believe that taxes should not be a burden or seem like a punishment. They should be a way for citizens to share in improving our country. They should be a way to help lift all Fijians. They should be a way to raise the standard of living, promote public safety, and provide the services that government is best placed to provide. That is my aim. And by reducing the burden of taxes and raising the value of what you receive for your taxes, I believe people will see paying their taxes as one of the many privileges of being a Fijian, and not just a civic duty.

One of our key initiatives in the 2013 Budget is the increase in the tax threshold for individuals from $15,600 to $16,000 in 2013. This means that more Fijians at low-income levels will not be paying taxes at all.

We are also making the Pay As You Earn or PAYE as a final tax this year, which means ordinary taxpayers will not have to file tax returns in 2014.

So we do not think that we are asking too much by asking Fijians to pay their taxes and asking our importers and exporters

to comply with our laws. If we all do our honest share, we will all gain.

Tax evasion and customs fraud not only rob the Government of money but also deny opportunities for all other law-abiding Fijians who rely on the services Government provides.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to remind you that law-abiding taxpayers are also eligible for FRCA’s Gold Card Premium Reward program. Being a member gives you a red carpet service with FRCA or one of its partnering agencies, such as the Land Transport Authority, Immigration Department, Air Pacific and Biosecurity Authority of Fiji.

This is not a rich man’s club and a club for businesses. Anyone who has been diligent about paying their taxes can become a member.

My fellow Fijians, I now have much pleasure in declaring the FRCA Rakiraki Customer Services Centre open.

Vinaka vakalevu.

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