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

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

**SPEECH AT THE PRESENTATION OF CHEQUES TO WOMEN PENSIONERS**

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**GOVT BLDGS 0915 Hours**

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**Women Pensioners;**

**Members of the Media;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

A very good morning to you all.

In the 2014 Budget, I promised that we will compensate women who were civil servants and who lost all their retirement benefits accrued during the years they were unmarried. For this group of women, upon marriage, they were deemed to resign for a day and then were re-appointed and the clock for pension only started ticking then.

For example, some of you women worked for 10 years; got married and upon re-appointment, were employed for another 15 years as a civil servant before eventually retiring. Upon retirement, your pension drawdown entitlement was only for the 15 years post marriage – you lost those 10 years prior. In a way, this treatment depicted that a woman was only of value, only when she married. This is an injustice and I am glad to say that today we will begin to make payouts to amend this discriminatory treatment thrust upon us by our Colonial masters and not corrected by subsequent governments.

Given that the discrimination was the non-acknowledgement of the years of service prior to marriage, we have used the same calculation that was for the men who, at that time had the option to choose between FNPF and the Government Pension Scheme and who had opted for FNPF. The calculation used the salary relevant at the time of joining FNPF. This was not made available for the women within that same period who were required to join FNPF, upon marriage. We acknowledge that women who worked for five years or more were paid a marriage gratuity payment, however, we have not factored this in our calculations.

When using this calculation, we realized that the amount payable was minimal and that is why my Government has given, in addition to the calculated payments, an incremental baseline range starting from $2000 for the intervals of completed months in service. For example, a spinster who served 200 months will have a different incremental baseline to a spinster who served 1 month.

That is why you are here. This is my Government’s way to right an injustice that was never dealt with. Not even by past governments despite repeated requests by this group of women. And for that, we are committed to amongst other things the removal of archaic laws, rules and barriers that breeds injustice, inequality and hinders our progress as a nation. It is my Government’s responsibility to create a level playing field for all.

Following months of information seeking and verifications of mostly archived records, we can now comfortably pay what is due to you. I do so with a sense of contentment basically for 2 reasons; firstly, I believe that women are better at managing money compared to the other half, so I urge you to put your money to good use or investment; and secondly, that this act is a continuation of my Government’s determination to look after retirees, and pensioners regardless of whether they were men or women- those who had helped shape our country.

It may not be the amount that you expect, but I hope that it will be multiplied with the understanding that my Government responded to your quest for fairness and recognition.

For your information, about 600 applications were received by the Ministry of Finance from January to August 2014. These applications went through a very thorough verification process. The process was challenging because most of the files were closed and archived. Similarly, improper record keeping and filing systems tested the patience and endurance of our verification team.

More importantly, however, the expectation to calculate and accurately facilitate payment caused our team to diligently comb the files and documents and sacrificing timeliness of the payout as a result. But we are here now and we are ready.

I will release the first 50 cheques for the women that have qualified. As I do so, I want you to know that my Government recognizes and values your investment and the time you spent in the civil service during the years gone by.

Vinaka Vakalevu.

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