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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**

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**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF GHANDI BHAWAN PRIMARY SCHOOL NEW CLASSROOM BLOCKS**

**Gandi Bhawan Primary School Fri. 18 July, 2014**

**LAUTOKA 1200 Hours**

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**The Manager of the Gandhi Bhawan Primary School;**

**The Head Teacher and Staff;**

**Parents and Other Guests;**

**Boys and Girls.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here in the West this morning to open this new block of classrooms at your school and to have the opportunity to meet so many of you face-to-face.

I’d like to start by paying tribute to the Shri Sanatan Dharam Ramayan Mandli and the school management for coming up with the $130,000 needed to complete this project.

My Government has always been willing to invest in the education of Fijian children and as I’ve said before, I am more proud of our free schooling program that anything else we have ever done. But it’s also important for the community to play its part wherever it can and the fact that you have done so here has set a wonderful example to the rest of the country.

This is not an occasion for party politics but I do want to say something about the need for national unity, especially in the lead-up to the general election on 17 September. There are certain politicians trying to stir up division in the country for their own political purposes. But I urge ordinary Fijians to reject that division and do whatever they can to keep our country unified and stable.

I urge them to look to the future and not the past and decide for themselves what is best for them and their families. Because what’s important above all else is that this election lays the foundation for a better Fiji for our young people. And that we embrace the politics of hope that the future offers and not the politics of fear and division that has held our nation back.

And as I look around here today, I’m especially proud to see the bright young faces of children from all sorts of backgrounds who make up your school community of 570 pupils. These children are not bound by the past or the old ways of thinking. They are the faces of the new Fiji – energetic, eager to learn, getting on with each other and looking towards the great future that awaits them as Fijians in the years ahead.

I keep saying that there has never been a better time to be a Fijian child. I want you to think about the importance of caring for each other, of loving each other, and especially of taking care of other children who may not be as strong as you are. One of the most important things I keep saying is that in the new Fiji, we must make sure that no-one is left behind. It is up to the strong to protect the weak and the vulnerable - young and old - and that’s what I’d like you all to do.

I also want to say that in the new Fiji, no-one is better than anyone else. It doesn’t matter who you are, what family you come from or whether you have more money or things than someone else. We are all equal and we need to work together and take everyone with us on our journey as a nation.

Nothing is more important than for us to be united, for everyone to work together, to join hands, to build the nation that we all love so much. We are all on the same team – Team Fiji – and everyone has their position on the team and part to play.

As a team, we must all turn our backs on anyone who tries to divide us, to tell us that we can never be truly united because we might be different from someone else. It doesn’t matter what your background is, what your religion is or what your parents do. We are all important members of Team Fiji. Everyone belongs.

Boys and Girls, you have been given a fantastic opportunity to get on in life – the best opportunity that any Fijian child has ever been given in the history of our nation. For the first time, my Government has been able to provide you with free schooling, not only here in primary school but when you get older and go on to high school.

Not so long ago in Fiji, if you came from a poor family, you couldn’t go to school because your parents didn’t have the money to pay for your education. Can you imagine the heartbreak that caused for so many families? That their dreams for their children couldn’t be achieved? Can you imagine not being able to come to school, to not learn anything, to not have the opportunity to get on in life?

It was terribly sad. And when I became Prime Minister, I was determined to do something about it. To make sure that every child in Fiji finally got a level playing field and the chance to do their best.

My Government now pays for your schooling. And if you want to go on to high school – which I want you all to do - or on to university or technical college, we are also giving you the chance to do that.

If you happen to be in the top 600 students at the end of high school, we will give you a scholarship in chosen areas of study at tertiary level. But if you’re not in the top 600, we will still pay for your tertiary tuition fees which you pay back gradually when you get a job.

The lesson from all of this is that you need to work as hard as you can on your studies here, work as hard as you can when you get to high school and take advantage of the chance we are giving you to go further – to become a doctor or a nurse, a farmer, carpenter, plumber, electrician or engineer. Or any number of other jobs that any country needs and that can provide a better living for you and your family.

So work hard at your studies and play hard on the sports field or your other activities. And above all, learn to enjoy learning new things and gaining extra knowledge.

That’s the way for you to become smarter and the way for our country to become smarter – everyone trying to learn as much as they can so we can eventually be seen by the rest of the world as a clever country.

To finish, I want to urge pupils and parents alike to look to the future, not to the past, and to imagine where we can be as a nation if we all put our differences aside and work together. Because I think we will be champions. Team Fiji will be unbeatable.

Thank you for your welcome, thank you for listening. And I now have great pleasure in declaring the new classroom blocks at the Ghandi Bhawan Primary School open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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