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

**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 THE SOLAR PROJECT FUNDED BY FIJI WATER FOUNDATION**

**Wainimakutu High School Thurs. 24th July, 2014**

**NAMOSI 1100 Hours**

**The Chief and People of Wainimakutu,**

**The President, Senior Vice President, CEO and Employees**

**of Fiji Water and the Fiji Water Foundation and Representatives of It’s Time Foundation;**

**The Manager, Principal and Staff of the Wainimakutu High School,**

**The Primary School Head Teacher and Staff,**

**Parents, Families, Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls,**

I’m delighted to be here in Namosi once again for a very important occasion – the day in which we harness the power of the Sun to provide us with the energy needs of this School in an isolated part of our beautiful country.

Thank you for inviting me here to launch this solar project at the Wainimakutu High School, which has been funded by the charitable arm of our export icon - Fiji Water – and the It’s Time Foundation.

It’s wonderful to see so many of you face-to-face and I can think of few better occasions than the launch of this energy source of the future to say something about the future of our nation as a whole.

As we approach our General Election on 17 September, I urge you all to set your eyes firmly on the future because we must stay unified and work together as one nation to secure that future.

I am the Prime Minister for all Fijians. And the NEXT Government must represent all Fijians, not only those of a certain ethnic background or religion. So when it comes to vote on election day, choose wisely. You have one decision and one alone to make. Who is best placed to take Fiji forward.

It is of a smarter country in which every Fijian child gets the best possible chance to fulfill their dreams and the dreams of all of us for even better days ahead. Because we have ended the era of division. We have brought down the barriers between us. We have created a level playing field and are giving ordinary people – no matter who they are – the things they need to power ahead.

Now is the time to talk about the future – here and now in Namosi. Where at this school, we are launching a project today that will power this place in a way that is the way of the future. Clean, sustainable and provided by the Sun, which lights up our lives by day and whose energy we can now capture to light up our lives at night.

As you know, my Government has done more than any other to extend electricity to as many parts of Fiji as possible and we have now reached up to 95 per cent. But unfortunately mains power has yet to reach more isolated parts of the country and this is one of them.

Until now, the Wainimakutu School has only been able to afford to run its diesel-powered generator for three or four hours a week during the daytime and four hours in the evenings for after-dark study and to supply the teachers’ quarters.

Now all that has changed, with a solar plant that I’m told is state of the art and will provide you with a constant source of power. We need to embrace that technology whenever we can in Fiji. Because delivering electricity is one thing. How that electricity is generated that is just as important, especially for the health of our national economy.

Fiji’s future depends on us developing alternative forms of energy to the fossil fuels, like diesel, that we are currently having to buy from overseas. We simply cannot afford to keep spending around $1-billion a year on our national fuel bill. Because it is depriving us of dollars that we could be using to continue to improve our service delivery program.

The other day, we had something of a reprieve when there was a fall across the board in fuel prices for the latest quarter. But we have no control over these prices. They are set by the international marketplace and the only way to cut our fuel bill is to either use less power or develop alternative sources. We clearly need more power, not less, for our economy to grow. So we are stepping our efforts to develop energy generated by water – in the case of our hydro-electric schemes – or the Sun, in the case of projects like this. Cleaner, greener, more affordable, more sustainable.

A couple of weeks back, I was delighted to turn the ground on a $15-million hydro-electric project at Somosomo – funded by China - to provide power to the people of Taveuni. Last December, Japan assisted us to provide solar power to the village of Rakua in Beqa. And now, I’m delighted to see the Fiji Water Foundation and the It’s Time Foundation making their own contribution to bring solar power to Wainimakutu in Namosi.

To the President of Fiji Water and the rest of his management team, the founder of It’s Time, Rob Edwards, and the personnel of both Foundations, I want to extend my warm appreciation for the contribution you have made and the partnership we have forged.

Thank you on behalf of the people of Namosi. And thank you on behalf of every Fijian. Because this is just one of the projects you are undertaking to provide the same benefit to schools in other rural parts of the country.

I also want to acknowledge CBS Power Solutions and its Director Amit Singh, who donated the labour to install this equipment free of charge.

With this project, you have helped open up a world of opportunity for the young people here. You have broadened their horizons. Because now they will have the opportunity to access computers and other audio visual aids that are an integral part of a modern education – an electronic education. An education to prepare these rural children for lives in a modern world.

I have to say that seeing the bright young faces here today – and seeing what they are now being provided with thanks to this partnership – fills me with inspiration and optimism for our nation and its future.

Thanks to you, they are being handed the keys to that future. And this is a wonderful example of private enterprise working with Government and the community– of joining hands – to help build the new Fiji.

To the students and teachers I say: You have been given a great opportunity. Seize it and use it to the fullest. As I keep saying all over Fiji, we have created a level playing field for every Fijian child to achieve their dreams. I urge you all to run as hard as you can. Because when you achieve your dreams, we all achieve our dreams. As you build your own life, we are building our nation.

My fellow Fijians, with those words I now have great pleasure in officially launching the Wainimakutu High School Solar Project.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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