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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, National Archives and Library Services of Fiji, i-Taukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

**ADDRESS AT THE FIJI INTERNATIONAL GOLF TOURNAMENT DINNER**

Intercontinental Fiji Golf Resort and Spa Tue 12 Aug 2014

Natadola 1900 Hours

**His Excellency, the President of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau;**

**The Attorney-General & Minister for Tourism, Mr. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum;**

**Your Excellency’s;**

**Distinguished Participants;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

Bula Vinaka and good evening to you all.

It’s my great pleasure to be here to officially open the inaugural Fiji International PGA golf tournament and to meet some of the golfing world’s top players and personalities.

I would like to extend a special welcome to Fiji’s very own Vijay Singh, who has been an inspiration to us all for his success on the world stage. We also welcome home Dinesh Chand, another elite Fijian golfer who is participating in this tournament after many years overseas in Japan. Vijay and Dinesh, I certainly hope that this tournament inspires more young Fijians to take up the game of golf and that some might follow in your footsteps.

And of course, a very warm welcome to all the other competitors – including Nick Price, Liang Wen-chong, and Anirban Lahiri – as well as to members of the Professional Golfers Association. Welcome to Fiji!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next four days, you will have the opportunity to experience Fiji’s world-class facilities, our beautiful natural surroundings, and some of the culture and traditions that make Fiji such a unique place.

I expect that the true highlight of your time here though – beyond the golf of course! – will surely be the people you meet. Without the welcoming nature, hospitality and openness of the Fijian people, Fiji would be just another string of beautiful islands. The word *“unique”* is often bandied around far too easily these days to describe things that aren’t necessarily unique at all. But by the end of your visit, I think that everyone in this room will agree that Fiji really is unique, not so much because of its islands but because of its people.

So while the Fiji International may be the newest leg of the PGA’s Australasia tour, I’m confident that Fiji will quickly capture the imaginations, the hearts and the minds of golfers and fans across the region and around the world.

Although Fiji has long offered a selection of beautiful courses, both to visitors and to local golfers, we have never truly capitalized on the sport’s potential here, especially as we are naturally positioned to take advantage of golf’s rapidly growing popularity in Asia. Experience tells us that golf tends to attract visitors who come not only to play at spectacular golf courses like the one here in Natadola, but also to enjoy the many beautiful resorts, activities and attractions that can be found in our country.

While the growth of golf tourism depends in part on the development of more high-quality golfing facilities, it also depends on marketing the ones we already offer to golfers and their families around the world. To this end, we believe that the Fiji International will instantly establish Fiji as a top golfing destination in the region and further afield. Indeed, the tournament is the first of its kind in the South Pacific and sets a new benchmark for sporting events here.

My Government is very pleased that we were able to partner with the PGA to make it a reality. For us, it’s one of the smartest investments we can make in our tourism industry, the top foreign exchange earner in Fiji. To give you an idea of just how important the industry is: tourism provides employment to one in every three Fijians. Last year, tourism contributed approximately 33.3 per cent to our GDP, and we expect this to grow even higher next year.

The Fiji International is the latest addition to a host of Government initiatives to support and grow this essential industry.

With a potential broadcast reach to more than 400 million people across 30 countries, the tournament will showcase Fiji as a must-visit golf and tourist location in countless homes around the globe. And beyond that, through the tournament’s partnership with the One Asia tour, we will be able to promote Fiji in even more markets throughout Asia.

And this is just the beginning. We have confirmed the Fiji International for the next five years with a guaranteed minimum prize purse of US $1 million. I would like to thank the PGA for the faith it has put in Fiji to hold one of its major events. Faith in our infrastructure. Faith in our economy.  And faith in our people. The brand-value of the PGA, of course, also increases by partnering with Fiji. We see this as a long-term partnership and we look forward to working with the PGA to promote the event and also to market Fiji to the world for many years to come.

In Fiji, we are very careful about what we attach our national name to. As Fijians, we are proud of our home and we want to make sure that pride is reflected whenever we fasten our name to something. In fact, over the past few years we have launched a determined campaign across a broad front to build up “*Brand Fiji” –* to establish Fiji as a by-word for quality and authenticity. Well, the Fiji International is a wonderful addition to the brand and is something that all Fijians can be proud about.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the course of this week, you will notice genuine Fijian crafted arts and handicrafts on display. These handicrafts are certified under Government's *"Fijian Made/ Buy Fijian Campaign."* I encourage you to take a moment or two to visit the crafters’ tents. And as always, I urge you take time out to enjoy more of our beautiful country and the celebrated hospitality and warmth of the Fijian people.

Finally, to the competitors: best of luck. We are all hoping for good weather and strong competition. There can only be one winner, but I hope all of you enjoy your time here and come back next year.

It is now my pleasure to officially open the Fiji International and to wish you all an enjoyable evening.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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