****

**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**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**SPEECH AT THE RATU SUKUNA MEMORIAL SCHOOL PASSOUT PARADE**

**RSMS Fri. 25th July, 2014**

**NABUA 1000 Hours**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Principal and staff of the Ratu Sukuna Memorial School;

Parents and Invited Guests;

Cadets and fellow Students;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here at this distinguished school – that takes its name from one of Fiji’s greatest statesmen – to review the passing out parade of your cadet corps.

This parade is taking place after a lapse of seven years, and I couldn’t be more pleased to see you all gathered here again looking so resplendent and smart.

It’s a sight that I’m certain would have pleased Ratu Sukuna himself. As many of you will know, he was not only a great leader and servant of the Fijian people, he was also a great warrior.

I urge you all – if you haven’t already done so – to inspect his service medals that are on display at the Fiji Museum. You will find among them two of France’s greatest honours – the Military Medal and the Cross of War.

How Ratu Sukuna came to get them is a wonderful story in itself. The British, who ran Fiji as a colony, wouldn’t allow the iTaukei to serve In the First World War. But Ratu Sukuna wasn’t deterred. He was so determined to fight the Germans that he crossed over the English Channel to France and joined the French Foreign Legion.

Imagine the initiative it took for an i’Taukei 100 years ago to travel across the world, refuse to accept it when the British said “no”, find another country prepared to let him fight, learn French so he could communicate with his fellow soldiers and go on to have such a distinguished war.

Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna – as he became – remains an inspiration to us all a century on. And here at the school that bears his name, his spirit is with us today. I’m sure that like me, he would have been thrilled to see you all lined up looking so proud and smart.

Your cadet corps is part of the long military tradition in Fiji that is at the centre of our national life. It has seen us serve with distinction in successive conflicts – the First World War, the Second World War and Malaya.

Our job then was to wage war and many Fijians paid the ultimate sacrifice, including our celebrated Victoria Cross winner, Sefanaia Sukunaivalu. But in more recent times, our job has been to keep the peace.

For more than three decades, we have provided troops to the international community through the United Nations for its peacekeeping operations in various parts of the world. Our task is the most noble of all for any soldier – to try to prevent war, to put ourselves between the warring factions to keep the peace, to protect vulnerable ordinary people, to guard them from the bullets, the bullying and the terror. To keep them safe.

Over the past couple of days, we have seen an outbreak of fighting between the warring parties on the Golan Heights, where we have spent more than a year keeping the peace. Today, we think of our brave men and women in uniform who are caught in the middle but who have been highly trained to look after themselves. We pray for their continuing safety. And they are all in our hearts and minds today.

The night before last, we saw the safe return to Fiji of some of the men and women who left us a year ago as part of our first deployment. We give thanks to God for their safe return and as a nation, thank them for their courageous service.

If you happen to see one of them, I urge you all to go up and shake their hand and say thank you yourself. They are a great credit to themselves and to our nation. They have done us proud, as have all of our troops wherever they are – in the Golan Heights, Sinai, Iraq, Sudan. There are currently more than one thousand of them overseas. Serving Fiji. Serving the world.

Ordinary Fijians look to the RFMF as the ultimate guarantors of their security, their right to go about their daily lives unmolested, to sleep soundly in their beds at night. And they look to the RFMF to be the ultimate guarantors of our Constitution – to uphold it and defend it.

This Constitution declares a common and equal citizenry in Fiji for the first time in our history, gives everyone unprecedented social and economic rights, guarantees the protection of I’Taukei land, guarantees religious freedom and finally establishes a level playing field on which every citizen has the same opportunity to achieve their goals. It is just, it is fair and it cannot be changed without the approval of 75 per cent of MPs in our new Parliament and 75 per cent of the electorate.

Some politicians are going into this election saying that if elected, they will change the Constitution. But they cannot do so unless they meet this threshold. And I’m confident that enough Fijians will rally around the Constitution to make this virtually impossible. Because the document meets the standards of even the world’s greatest democracies, and Fiji is determined to join their ranks.

This Constitution also declares everyone a Fijian, giving us all a common name and a common identity for the first time and strengthens our sense of unity and belonging.

I want to say to all of you here today: As far as I am concerned, no-one is an outsider in the new Fiji. We all belong. We are all Fijian.

And I am asking for your support to keep our country unified, to turn your backs on the politics of the past and embrace the glorious future that lies ahead if we can stay unified and focused. If we can work together – hand in hand - to put Fiji first and make Fiji great.

Looking out across this parade today, I feel a great sense of inspiration and optimism about our nation. By joining the cadets, you have embraced the notion of patriotism – of love of country – of discipline, duty, honour, integrity, honesty and the wonderful principle of service that we must always place at the centre of our national life.

Service is the core principle of my own Government. We serve the Fijian people. And we serve them equally not matter who they are or where they come from. Unlike our political opponents, we don’t believe in serving just one section of the population or the elite. We govern for all.

I am the Prime Minister for all. And I am asking the nation to join me – to put their trust in me – to continue that record of service in the years ahead as we deliver, to the Fijian people, the things they need to improve their lives.

To everyone at the Ratu Sukuna Memorial School I say: rededicate yourselves to the principle of service embodied in the life of the great man your school is named after. Take advantage of the free schooling and tertiary benefits my Government has provided to work as hard as you can to fulfill your dreams. Dream big dreams for our nation. Because together – with our eyes set firmly on the future – great days lie ahead.

You have made me very proud today. You have made your RFMF instructors proud. You have made your parents and teachers proud. You are a great credit to your school and a great credit to our nation. May God Bless us all in the new Fiji we are building together.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_