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Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Public Service, People’s Charter and Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources

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SPEECH FOR THE ARRIVAL OF FIJI AIRWAYS A330 NAMUKA-I-LAU. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Air Pacific Hanger Thursday 23May 2013
NADI 1430 Hours**

Distinguished Guests;

My fellow Fijians.

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

Two months ago, I stood here with many of you to welcome the first of the new Fiji Airways A 330s – Island of Taveuni.

It was a day we will never forget because of the surge of pride that flowed through every Fijian.

As the new plane flew low over our islands, cities, towns and villages, tens of thousands of people came out to welcome it.

The sense of excitement was amazing. It was a special day to be Fijian.

When they gazed up, people could see Fiji Airways in big bold letters - the name of our country on a brand new wide-bodied plane, the first we’ve ever owned.

And they could see something spectacular – a design that speaks to all of us - the masi livery created not by some fancy design studio overseas but by one of our own – an ordinary Fijian by the name of Makareta Matamosi.

Like every Fijian, I was tremendously impressed and inspired by her creation.

How wonderful that this is the image of Fiji that these new planes will take to airports around the world.

How wonderful that Makareta’s creation has been hailed as brilliant by so many design experts around the world.

Makareta, vinaka vakalevu. You did us proud. You did your country proud and you did your home island proud.

Which is why today we welcome “ Island of Namuka-i-lau”.

As you all know, Air Pacific has a tradition of naming its aircraft after islands and this tradition continues with Fiji Airways.

And so it was that I suggested to the Air Pacific Board that we name this second Airbus after Makareta’s island in honour of her work.

This afternoon, before it landed here in Nadi, the plane flew low over Namuka-i-Lau to give the people there a closer look.

We can be sure it was a thrill they will remember for the rest of their lives.

Because now Namuka-i- Lau isn’t just a small obscure island in Lau but the name on a state- of- the- art aircraft that millions of people will see at airports around the world.

Of course, the arrival of our second A330 can never be as exciting as the first. But I believe this is equally special because we are reminded of the richness of our culture and the wonderful creativity of artisans like Makareta who keep it alive and display it to the world.

The plane itself is the second of three that have been designed for our use from the ground up.

They are hugely important for the new Fiji Airways and for every Fijian – because they are destined to bring millions of visitors to our shores in the coming years to underpin the strength of our economy and ensure the nation’s prosperity.

They are also flying billboards for Fiji – a message to the world that we are open for business and want to share our beautiful surroundings, our culture and our hospitality with the peoples of other lands.

“Fiji, where happiness finds you”. Fiji Airways, the best way to get to Fiji because the Fijian experience begins before you arrive.

As I’ve said before, my Government encourages competition as the best way to keep airfares affordable for ordinary people. But that doesn’t stop me from urging every Fijian to support their national airline, to keep their dollars in Fiji and safeguard the jobs of Fijian workers.

With these new planes, Fiji Airways gains a new ability to compete against its rivals.

Now that the second is here, the airline will be starting its A330 service to Sydney in a couple of weeks, to add to those already operating to Auckland, Brisbane and Hong Kong. And soon, the new aircraft will begin flying to Los Angeles, with extra services coming on stream later in the year when the third and final Airbus arrives and our 747s are retired.

On the 26th of next month, Air Pacific formally becomes Fiji Airways. The new branding will be unveiled across its network, cabin staff will begin wearing their new uniforms and higher standards of in-flight services will be introduced.

When that happens, Fiji Airways will really begin to soar – confident, competitive and eager to find new routes and opportunities.

I want to thank the management and staff of Air Pacific for the way in which they’ve worked together over the past couple of years to reverse the airline’s fortunes.

There’s a new spirit in the airline as workers begin to share in the profits that are flowing from its better performance. It is spearheading the labour reforms that my Government wants in the interests of all Fijians. Far from reducing workers’ rights – as some claim – we are empowering them by giving them a financial stake in the airline’s success. A stake in the future.

The evidence of that new spirit is all around us today – a day to remember, a day to be proud of our national airline, a day to be proud to be Fijian.

We welcome the “Island of Namuka-i-lau”.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.