

Commodore 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 PACIFIC DESTINATIONZ 15TH ANNIVERSARY AND LAUNCH OF NEW DELUXE TOURIST COACHES**

Westin Denarau Is. Resort Thurs. 9th Jan., 2014

DENARAU 1830 Hours

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**Attorney-General and Minister for Tourism,**

**Pacific Destinationz Executive Chairman, Graeme Badland;**

**Pacific Destinationz Managing Director, James Sowane;**

**Management and Staff of Pacific Destinationz;**

**Invited Guests,**

**My fellow Fijians,**

Bula vinaka and good evening to you all.

Since it was founded 15 years ago, Pacific Destinationz has become one of the most recognised and trusted names in Fiji’s Tourism Industry.

The company is a joint venture between New Zealand and Fijian owners and has moved from rather humble origins to a shinning example of a successful local enterprise.

My Government is unwavering in its support for Fijian businesses, and so it’s indeed a great pleasure to be here to celebrate this company’s 15th anniversary.

For 15 years, Pacific Destinationz has helped strengthen our Tourism Industry by promoting Fiji in some of our most important markets overseas. And for 15 years, they have helped ensure that visitors to our country receive the best possible experience from their very first moments here.

I’m sure that Pacific Destinationz will continue to improve upon this experience by setting new standards. Indeed, the purchase of two new deluxe coaches is a perfect example of their commitment to this goal.

But the coaches won’t just mean better business for one company. All development and progress within the Tourism Industry is inter-connected. The Fiji experience is not measured by a single company or a single hotel or a single attraction.

It’s about the whole picture. Guests judge their experiences here on a combination of factors, from the accommodation they choose, to the taxi drivers they speak with, to the restaurants they eat at, to the road-side stalls they buy fruit or crafts from.

It’s a collective effort, and we grow stronger as we continue to support and challenge each other to keep pushing the Industry forward. In this way, each time a step is taken, big or small, to achieve higher standards and improve visitors’ experiences, brand *“Fiji”* is strengthened.

To support these efforts, my Government decided to completely overhaul and rebrand Tourism Fiji so that it better promotes the efforts of individual companies, local businesses, and ordinary Fijians to innovate, to grow and to prosper together – to continue to raise the bar to make Fiji one of the most popular tourism destinations in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Just as it is within the Tourism Industry, all development and progress within Fiji as a whole is inter-connected. It’s not about one policy, one initiative, or one sector. It’s about how they relate to and feed off of each other to improve the lives of ordinary Fijians, by enhancing services, growing the economy and creating jobs that pay a living wage.

Here we are at the beginning of 2014, the year that will see Fiji raise up a new parliamentary democracy, based for the first time on the principle of a common citizenry. And as I stand here and look at the year ahead, my message to you is clear: Fiji is on the right track.

Guided by the new Constitution, we are walking down a path that leads to stability, equality and prosperity. There is hope for the future where there wasn’t before and this is something to be excited and proud about.

Each person must decide for him-or-herself what they want this future to look like. This is an individual choice and one that I urge each of you to think about seriously, especially as we move closer to elections and you are faced with different ideas and opinions.

For its part, my Government has been working to build a solid and durable foundation upon which to build the new Fiji. This has meant adopting a holistic and long-term approach to reform – electoral, constitutional, social, institutional and economic.

One of the cornerstones of our reform program is that policies must be consistent. This is the only way they can be effective and bring real benefit to the country.

For example, investors and stakeholders need to have confidence that if we lower tax rates one year, they won’t be raised the next. If that confidence doesn’t exist, they won’t reinvest that money, grow their businesses and create new jobs.

Similarly, programs like free primary and secondary education and government loans for university must continue from one year to the next in order to truly benefit future generations of Fijians and our nation as a whole.

The same is true in areas like infrastructure development. For example, if we do not continue our push to upgrade our roads and then to maintain them, before long they would fall back into the sorry state we found them in.

My fellow Fijians, I firmly believe that if Fiji continues along the path we have set and maintain our current policies, our opportunities are limitless.

We are blessed with so many advantages in terms of our location, our people and our resources. Indeed, many financial institutions, both local and international, agree that if we keep our hands on the controls and maintain the course we’re on, Fiji will continue to rocket ahead and in 4 or 5 years’ time we will be one of the true success stories of the Pacific.

With those few words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to wish you all an enjoyable evening and once again congratulate Pacific Destinationz on their 15th Anniversary. Here’s to the next 15 years (raise glass). Cheers.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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