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**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 OPENING OF THE NEW SUVA METEOROLOGY OFFICE

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Fletcher Road Wed. 11th Dec., 2013

VATUWAQA 0930 Hours

**Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

It’s a pleasure to be here to mark an important milestone in Fiji’s ability to provide timely and accurate climate-related information that will ultimately help save lives and protect property.

The new Suva Meteorological Weather Office is a state of the art facility that will drastically improve our risk assessment and early warning capabilities, increase our ability to conduct important research, and enhance weather information services to the Fijian people and other Pacific Islanders.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the recent weeks I have spoken a lot about climate change. Whatever its cause, island nations like ours feel its effects more intensely than the larger countries of the developed world.

Climate change causes extreme weather patterns such as intense flooding and ever more frequent tropical storms and cyclones. This is a reality that we have to face in the Pacific region.

Over the last decade, tropical cyclones and floods have cost more than 100 lives and hundred of millions of dollars worth of damages in Fiji alone.

So we have learned to be prepared. And I am proud to say that preparedness meant that not a single life was claimed by Cyclone “Evan” last year.

But we cannot drop our guard and the opening of this new Weather Office is part of a serious campaign to equip Fiji with the latest technology that will increase our capacity to deal with natural disasters.

The equipment housed in this new facility is a far cry from that possessed by Fiji’s first national Weather Office that was built on this site in 1942.

The new two-story building was constructed at a total cost of $3.6million and it houses a modern IT infrastructure, Conference Room and communication facilities.

The Suva Office will work in close co-ordination with the Nadi Forecasting Centre to detect extreme weather and flooding. If the Nadi office goes offline for whatever reason, the Suva Office will take the point position to ensure essential services are continued.

But it’s not just about early detection. The new technology in this facility will also allow us to conduct important climate-related research. The demand for data about the weather is very high for a number of development related purposes.

There’s no doubt that future strategies to deal with climate change will depend upon sound knowledge of past and present climate around our nation and in our region.

This is an important point. This new Weather Office will not only provide services to Fiji, but also to seven other Pacific island countries: Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru and Cook Islands.

Under the World Meteorological Organisation, Fiji has assumed an important responsibility as a key strategic Tropical Warning Center for the South West Pacific region.

This means that Fiji is able to contribute substantially to the protection of life and property against natural disaster not just at home, but for our neighbours as well.

We perform this important job with a deep sense of humility and gratitude that we can provide this important service to the region.

In fact, given our strategic location, the Forecasting Center in Nadi is now one of six specialised centres for tropical cyclone warning and forecasting in the world.

This new Suva Office will support this undertaking by going a long way to raise the level of our Meteorological Services to the highest international standard.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to leave you with one final thought. While we cannot control the course of Mother Nature, with investment in the appropriate infrastructure and the latest technology, we can do our best to make sure we’re prepared for when she comes our way to save lives and property.

With those few words, I thank the Fiji Meteorological Service for its contribution to Fiji and the region over the past years and wish it many more years of success.

I now take great pleasure in officially opening the new Suva Meteorological Office.

**Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.**

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