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**SPEECH AT OPENING OF ADDITIONS TO SAVUSAVU MARKET**

**Savusavu Mon. 8th Sept., 2014**

**CAKAUDROVE 1300 Hours**

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The Special Administrator of Savusavu

Distinguished Guests,

My fellow Fijians.

Bula Vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

I’m always pleased to be in Savusavu – arguably the prettiest town in Fiji and certainly the North – and today is no exception.

But I’m even more delighted than usual because these improvements to the Savusavu market will benefit so many people in the town and surrounding region.

This is just the latest example of my Government’s determination to assist Fijians who grow crops and make handicrafts and other goods to be able to sell your products in more pleasant and hygienic surroundings.

We’ve created 60 additional stalls which will mean that those vendors who’ve been forced to sell on the streets can now move inside away from the sun and rain.

We are improving markets all over the country, modernising them and upgrading them so that vendors are able to display their goods to maximum advantage and get the returns they deserve for their hard work.

It’s also about improving the overall shopping experience for consumers, so that going to the market no longer means getting wet or negotiating smelly drains and clogged corridors. Our markets have clearly got to be more attractive to get more people out of the supermarkets and back to buying produce that is fresher and directly benefits ordinary Fijians.

We’ve come a long way with a number of major upgrades, most recently in Nadi on Friday and now here in Savusavu today. But we’ve also got plans to extend this to some of the stalls around Fiji selling produce by the roadside, and to those producers dependent on the passing trade.

A specific provision in ourManifesto promises to improve conditions for people selling agricultural produce and other products at established roadside sites in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are now nine days from the election and less than a week from the media blackout that precedes it.

So it is decision time for the whole nation, for every Fijian voter to choose which party and which candidates are best placed to take Fiji forward.

As I keep saying, it is a simple choice between the future and the past – embracing the united, prosperous future that I am offering the nation. Or allowing ourselves to be dragged back into the past, to the politics of division that has arrested Fiji’s development and kept our nation weak.

I urge you all to turn your backs on those who carry the blame for many of Fiji’s problems in the past and have emerged from the shadows still peddling their message of suspicion and hate. They are trying to tell you that the i’Taukei are threatened when, in fact, the opposite is true and we have never been stronger or more proud.

Our ownership of 91 per cent of the country’s land is guaranteed in our Constitution; Our freedom to be Christians and follow Jesus Christ is also guaranteed; there are many more of us than any other race and our birth rate is higher; our children have never lived longer because of better health services; my Government’s free primary and secondary schooling means that, for the first time, every i’Taukei child can get an education; those young people have never had a better chance to go to university or a technical college because of our scholarships and tertiary loans; the i’Taukei language is now a compulsory subject in our primary schools so it is also secure; Our culture and traditions are thriving

So I ask you: How are we threatened? The answer is that WE ARE NOT. It is a big lie to try to spread fear when there is no reason for the i’Taukei to fear anything. We are strong. We are proud. And to say that we need protection is an insult. It demeans us as a people.

Make no mistake. These people are trying to instil the mentality that the i’Taukei are weak simply to manipulate us and divide our nation. The truth is that we don’t need protection. We are the protectors. Among other things, we go out into the world as UN Peacekeepers to protect others.

45 of our Peacekeepers – our loved ones – have been detained in Syria doing their jobs and the prayers and thoughts of every Fijian are with them. My Government is doing everything possible – working with the UN and friendly countries – to secure their release. But we have no regrets about having sent them. It is Fiji’s contribution to the world. Standing tall. Keeping the peace. And it has earned our soldiers and our nation the respect of the world.

As you decide who to vote for, ask yourself this. Why are certain politicians telling me that I am under threat, my land is under threat, my way of life is under threat, where IT IS NOT. Let me suggest an answer:

My Government gave you the money you receive from the land you lease to decide for yourselves how it is spent. We empowered you, the ordinary people, by giving you the power to decide. That is democracy.

But these people want to take that money back from you and give it to the chiefs to decide for you. They don’t want you to have your say. They think they know better. Well, that is not democracy. That is a hereditary elite telling you what is best for you.

Believe me. Fiji must be the only country in the world where politicians have gone to ordinary people in an election campaign promising to take money off them. Money that rightfully belongs to you. Your birth right. Your inheritance.

Don’t turn the clock back. Insist on keeping what is yours. The chiefs have their place and we all respect the chiefly system. But we want them to lead by example in their public and personal lives. And we want them to serve us, as well as lead us, not take our money and tell us what to do. Or try to manipulate us with false warnings about threats to our way of life when none exist.

Look at my Government’s record by comparison. We lead by promoting unity and laying out a vision of one nation, one Fiji, in which everyone has an opportunity to share in the prosperity that lies ahead if we can remain united and focussed. We serve by delivering basic services to Fijians that improve their lives, like free education, better health facilities, better roads, electricity, water and telecommunications. And we empower by listening to the people, sharing their concerns, doing whatever we can to help them and respecting their right to be part of the decision-making process.

I’m not in the business of scaring anyone. On the contrary. I want Fijians to know that they can face the future with confidence and hope.

That if they put their trust in me to continue as Prime Minister, no-one will be left behind. And even better days lie ahead for every Fijian, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Our economy is thriving and we’re about to announce an upgrade of the growth forecast for this year to well over 4 per cent. And as our economy grows, we can spend more, which is why we’ve been able to announce further spending initiatives in our manifesto, including more programs to alleviate poverty and a further major provision to benefit the i’Taukei.

We will set aside $10-million to help the i’Taukei use their land for subdivision and development. For too long, landowners have leased out land for others to develop and make huge profits. We will encourage landowners to become landlords while reaping direct commercial benefits from their land. The funding will be made available as a grant to assist landowners to meet development costs, such as the provision of electricity water and roads. This will not only empower the i’Taukei but also contribute to national economic development.

So we are committed to strengthening the position of the i’Taukei, not weakening it. And, naturally they will also benefit from the other provisions in the Manifesto that apply to everyone.

I’ve spoken about the further improvements we intend to make to our markets and roadside stalls. But every small to medium enterprise will benefit from our other measures to assist this vital sector of our economy.

These include reviewing all our laws and regulations relating to business and building approvals to remove the red tape that is standing in the way of business and holding up projects that would benefit everyone. And some others:

* We will make it easier to establish small businesses by streamlining the current establishment requirements for businesses with an initial investment value below $500,000.
* We will implement the current recommendation for a new fee structure for small to medium enterprises. Under this structure, micro-finance entities and small businesses will be exempt from paying fees to meet health, fire and occupational health and safety regulations.
* We will provide micro-finance start-up grants to encourage small-scale economic activity. These grants will be targeted at individuals who have particular skill sets, such as handicrafts, or provide seed funding for those selling crops and other goods and services. Government will in the first year allocate $1-millon to cater for 1,000 recipients, who will each receive a grant of up to $1,000. This will be administered through the Ministry of Industry and Trade and channelled through financial institutions such as the Fiji Development Bank and commercial banks. By linking these small businesses to our mainstream financial institutions, it will encourage them to grow and give them more financial leverage.
* We will continue the Bainimarama Government’s current effort to encourage Fijians to attain business success. This includes the current training being provided through various local and international non-governmental organisations to teach people basic business skills, such as writing business proposals, cash flow management, account keeping, applying for loans, and business planning and strategy.

All this is designed to stimulate the small to medium business sector, grow the economy and create jobs. And then, of course, there are the cost of living provisions in our manifesto that will provide immediate relief to thousands of households across Fiji.

* We will increase the electricity subsidy for low-income families from the current 75 kilowatts per hour to 85kwh.
* We will provide 91,250 litres of water free of charge per year to Fijian households earning less than $30,000 a year. This is based on an average of 5 members per household and takes into account a World Health Organisation report that estimates that an individual requires 50 litres of water each day.

All these measures – plus a lot more – are in our manifesto, which I urge you all to read. But one of the most important is to continue and expand undoubtedly my Government’s proudest achievement – the free education we have provided in our primary and secondary schools, which we will extend to pre-schools next year.

From the beginning of the second term in 2015, free education will be available one year before admission to primary school at recognised and accredited pre-schools.

And because we want to encourage healthy bodies as well as healthy minds; we will provide 250 ml of milk a day to children enrolled in Class 1 at all primary schools starting from Term 1 of 2015. Preliminary discussions with Fiji Dairy Limited have already taken place and the cost is estimated at $2.5-million.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I keep telling our young people that there has never been a better time to be Fijian. We have nothing to fear but fear itself, as the great American President, Franklin D Roosevelt, told his people at the start of World War Two.

So I urge you all to reject the scaremongers – those among us peddling fear – and embrace my vision of a united, prosperous Fiji finally fulfilling its destiny and truly becoming the way the world should be.

Look around you at this beautiful town, around this beautiful bay, and imagine where we might have all been in Savusavu and in Fiji had we not wasted three precious decades of our development fighting over who should get a bigger slice of the national cake.

My Government believes in the nation working together hand in hand to grow that cake so that everyone can get a bigger slice to finally give our children the opportunities they deserve and that have been squandered.

To develop the North and more remote parts of Fiji so that they have everything in the way of services that Viti Levu enjoys. To build One nation One Fiji with opportunity and justice for all.

May God Bless us in our efforts to build a better Fiji. And may God bless everyone in Savusavu and the surrounding areas who will benefit from these improvements, which I now have the great pleasure to open.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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