

Rear Admiral Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, CF (Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

**SPEECH AT THE WESTPAC PRIME MINISTER’S EXPORTER OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

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

**Sofitel Resort & Spa Sat. 22nd Nov, 2014**

**DENARAU 1900 Hours**

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

* **Cabinet Ministers;**
* **Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corp;**
* **The Executive Chairman and Board of Directors of**

**Investment Fiji;**

* **Management and Staff of Investment Fiji;**
* **Event Sponsors and Category Award sponsors;**
* **Esteem exporters**
* **Members of the Media;**
* **Distinguished Guests;**
* **My fellow Fijians.**

Bula Vinaka, Namaste and Good Evening.

It is a great honour and privilege to be here tonight, to celebrate with you on this auspicious occasion for the achievements of our exporters. **2014 Westpac Prime Minister’s Exporter of the Year Awards** is a celebration of achievements. And I thank you all for being here to support and participate to celebrate the achievements of our Exporters.

Tonight is an exceptional night, as you exporters would be recognized for your zealous efforts in being a member of the exports community in Fiji, paving an exceptional path for the betterment of our beloved country. For your continuous strengthen in improving trade, in creation of employment for Fijians and contribution to the national economy, I thank you.

As part of this exporter awards Event we make speeches, there is much conviviality, the outstanding organizations receive their awards and we all go home feeling a deep sense of satisfaction of having been part of a prestigious occasion.

While many would say that only a handful of exporters take the bold step to apply against the Exporter Awards criteria, the challenge remains that more exporters, must continue to question the value that they are creating and more so to examine their systems and processes, with the intention to raising the level of quality and quantity of exports in Fiji. It is imperative that the exporting sector also embrace in including positive modern practices and devoting time in changing business strategies.

I believe that as the Prime Minister of this beautiful nation of Fiji, I am duty bound to encourage all organizations, big and small, to aspire for greater achievements and also to be an advocate of the trade in Fiji. As the theme for this year awards is **“Exporting for Growth: Building our Nation**” I truly believe that in this new democracy we can achieve this!

Tonight I would also like to highlight the importance of exporting community to renew its commitment to the cause of improving efficiency and active participation in trade improvement in Fiji. Having celebrated two decades of what has become Fiji’s premier award for exporters, it is incumbent upon every organization to ensure that we concertedly work at developing world class organizations in Fiji.

Evidence has shown that companies that are sensitive to environment, adapting and learning are long lived and as famous Dutch business executive, Arie de Geus has put, and I quote - *“The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage”.* Unquote. It is really utter folly to think that we can achieve amazing results by doing work the way we did a decade ago. Responding to change or embracing change is a characteristic of learning organizations which I challenge you all to adopt.

Stamping our mark therefore, in the international arena must be a priority by ensuring that our products and services are of the best quality and is recognized by the international competitive market. The *“Fijian Made”* and *“Buy Fijian”* campaigns are some examples of my Governments initiatives of promoting Fijian products not only in the domestic market but also internationally.

To achieve international stardom for Fijian products I will also urge all exporters to also include productivity initiatives for improvement in both machinery and labour productivity. My Government has already made a focused determination that education in primary and secondary schools would be free and you as business house should harness to improve labour productivity in Fiji.

This year I am proud to acknowledge our Youth Entrepreneurs who have contributed toward the Fijian economy and we know you have the capability to become excel in the arena of both business and trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I urge you all to renovate your commitment - your commitment to excel in whatever you do. Work diligently and smartly at what you do - as in doing so you will be contributing to the accomplishment of our national objectives to move Fiji forward. We must all pledge to raise the ability of our exporters to produce superior goods and services in the spirit of excellence, as our reputation and prosperity rests on these.

As a core motivation of improving trade in Fiji, every year after the announcement of the National Budget my Government is focusing on creating a viable investment climate in Fiji and improvement in trade policy for the economic betterment for Fiji. The result of the lucrative investment policies has seen a growth in the private sector investment achieving 15 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, a feat achieved only twice within the 44 years of Fiji independence. Coupled with a low inflation rate of 0.3%, achieving foreign reserves stands at $1,748 million, forecasted GDP growth of 3.8% and increase in numbers of foreign investment projects are an indication of a wave of high confidence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as improvement in Fiji’s export is very important for the result of inward remittance of funds, creation of much required employment and improvement in infrastructure it would consensually decided that any improvement in trade would have advantage in Fiji’s Gross Domestic Product.

Recently my Government has been involved in negotiation for the “PACER Plus” agreement which would should be the impetus of regional growth that entails the spirit of liberal trading. The endorsement of the Fiji’s Trade Policy Framework (TPF) is also critical in achievement progress in the vitality economic sector including Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Manufacturing Mining and other related vital sectors.

MSG Trade Agreement negotiations continue to be on Fiji’s agenda and we encourage all exporters and ready export companies to take advantage of these agreement.

My Government will continue to assist and diversify newer international opening that are viable to create lucrative terms of opportunities for Fijian exporters and increase Fiji’s exports, to raise our economic performance, reduce our trade deficit and ultimately, spread economic gains throughout the nation to alleviate poverty.

In closing, I would like to leave on the note that the awards night belongs to every exporter whose exemplary achievements we are gathered here to celebrate. Your achievements tonight speak of your determination, commitment and hard work. I urge you all to share your success stories with others and encourage them to begin the same journey.

Please enjoy the rest of night!

Vinaka Vakalevu and Thank You.

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