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**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**

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**SPEECH AT THE LAUTOKA DISTRICT SCOUTS RALLY**

**Fenner Park Fri. 18 July, 2014**

**LAUTOKA 1930 Hours**

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Leaders and Members of the Scout Movement,

Distinguished Guests,

My fellow Fijians.

I’m delighted to be here tonight to open the Lautoka Scouts Rally – in the biggest of the 26 Scouting Districts in Fiji - and to spend time with you all. The special welcome you provided me has left a deep impression, reminding me again of how wonderful the Scouts are and how important they are to our national life.

I can’t think of a better time to be here – the centenary year of the Scout Movement in Fiji, which was established in Suva in 1914 as part of the global movement led by Sir Robert Baden Powell.

100 years on, the values he espoused of service to the community and the nation – of lending a hand to people in need - live on in the hearts and minds of young people the world over.

Here in Fiji, the Scout Movement has never been more relevant. Your values are the values we aspire to as a nation; to be fit and healthy, to be good citizens, to think of others and not just ourselves and above all, to serve.

They are certainly the values that I hold most dear and that I have placed at the core of the Government I lead. We are here to serve the Fijian people, to provide them with the things they need to help themselves and their families.

We are here to encourage them to also embrace the idea of service to others, of their local community working together as one, of our nation working together as one. And of course, we are encouraging every Fijian to embrace the values that you have embraced as Scouts – to have integrity, to be honest, to be dependable, to be resourceful, to be independent, to have empathy for others and embrace a healthy lifestyle - to be sound in body and mind.

So in many ways, the Scout Movement is a beacon for the nation as a whole and in this centenary year, I want to pay tribute to the Scouts in Fiji and thank them on behalf of every Fijian for their service to our nation.

We think tonight of the countless thousands of young Fijians who have moved through the ranks of the Scouting Movement over the years, who have been Cubs, Brownies, Girl Guides, Venturers, Rovers, Scouts. Many of us still have mementoes from our own time in the movement - the badges and certificates that remind us of some of our earliest accomplishments in life and take us back to our formative years.

You have played a great role in building the characters of countless thousands of our young people. You have played a great role in building the character of our nation. Vinaka vakalevu.

I cannot help but think that some of our future leaders are out there among you tonight. You may end up in business, in government, the professions, the trades or in agriculture. You may even end up as a politician. But the things that you’ve learned as a Scout, the experiences you’ve had and the values that have been passed on to you, will always be with you. Certainly wherever you end up in life you will always remember the famous Scout motto – Be Prepared.

It means making sure as an individual that you have everything you need to face up to any challenge. To be always be ready to seize any opportunity that comes your way. Always be ready to use the skills you have acquired to help yourself, your family, your school, your community and your country.

You will eventually look back on these days as being among the best of your life. Some of the friends you make here will always stay with you. Some of your Scout leaders will always remain in your memory as role models, because they chose to serve and to pass on their skills to you.

The Scout motto – *Be Prepared* – also applies to our nation at this time. We need to be prepared, and we are prepared, for the General Election on 17 September that will introduce the first genuine democracy in Fijian history. We need to do everything possible to make it a success, to make it free and fair so that the result is accepted by every Fijian and the rest of the world.

We need to be prepared to argue the case for an equal and just Fiji, to demonstrate to ordinary people that while some politicians might be prepared to betray them, our Constitution will not. It protects the interests of everyone, protects iTaukei land, protects religious freedom and provides every Fijian with a range of rights they have never had before.

Some of you here who have reached the age of 18 will be voting in these elections for the first time. I urge you to approach them in the same way as any Scout approaches a decision. Don’t listen to what someone else is saying. Assess the situation for yourself. Read the Constitution and what it says. Conduct you own search for the truth.

I love the theme that you have chosen for this rally – *“Building Bridges of Friendship”.* Because that’s precisely what Fiji has to do as a nation - build bridges of friendship, not create chasms of suspicion. As I told some primary school children this morning, we need to care for each other, love each other and protect those who may not be as strong as we are.

As I keep saying: in the new Fiji, we must make sure that no-one is left behind. It is up to the strong to protect the weak and the vulnerable – children, the poor, the sick and the elderly - and that is a value that I know all of you – as Scouts – have already embraced in your own lives. To lend a helping hand to those in need.

We are building bridges of friendship here tonight, Scouts from schools all over the Lautoka District and from as far away as the Yasawas gathered together in friendship. I urge you all to build those bridges not only between yourselves but in your schools, your communities and your nation – in every avenue of your life.

As I keep saying, there has never been a better time to be Fijian and especially a young Fijian. Your schooling is now free and you have been given a unique opportunity – whatever your family circumstances – to get on in life, to run as hard as your can on the level playfield we have created for everyone.

We are on the verge of greatness as a nation, finally pulling together as one – Team Fiji, the best little team on the planet. But we can only do it if we build strong bridges of friendship – of unity, of purpose, of compassion – just as you are doing here as Scouts in Lautoka.

On behalf of every Fijian, I wish you all the best for the National Centennial Celebration at QVS in Matavatucou next month. Vinaka vakalevu to all the Scout leaders, teachers and parents who are here supporting our children. Vinaka to the military officers in Lautoka for supporting the event and the Lautoka City Council for providing the venue. And it is now my pleasure to declare the Lautoka District Annual Scouts Rally open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thankyou.

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