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**Commodore J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Public Service, People’s Charter and Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

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**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER AT THE STATE LUNCHEON**

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**Moscow Friday, 28 June, 2013
RUSSIA 1230 Hours**

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The Honourable Prime Minister Dmitry MEDVEDEV of the Russian Federation,

 Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka, (Russian equivalent), and a very good afternoon to you all.

On behalf of the Fijian delegation, I extend my warm thanks to you, Prime Minister, and the Government and people of the Russian Federation for the warm welcome you have given us to your great country.

Thank you, Prime Minister, for your friendship, generous hospitality and for hosting this wonderful state luncheon.

My official visit to the Russian Federation as Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji is truly historic; it is the first such visit by any Head of Government between our countries. The only previous high- level visit occurred in February 2012 when your Foreign Minister, the Honourable Sergey LAVROV, came to Fiji. We warmly welcomed that visit, just as we warmly welcome the opportunity to be with you in your great capital, Moscow.

These high level exchanges are a vital component of our relationship, as we seek to deepen our bilateral cooperation in all spheres of international diplomacy and global engagement. I trust that this high level of personal engagement will continue to be a feature of our relationship in the future.

Recent Political Changes in Fiji and the 2014 Election

Honourable Prime Minister, Fiji is undergoing major and fundamental reforms. We are also building the foundation for a new order that ensures that after the General Election in September 2014, we will have a genuine democracy in Fiji for the first time. It will include:

1. A Parliament that is truly democratic, elected on the basis of one person, one vote, one value, and responsive to the needs of the people;
2. A common and equal citizenry and an electoral system that is fair and free of any ethnic, religious, cultural or socio-economic discrimination, as in the past;
3. Policies that ensure transparent and accountable governance and fight the scourge of corruption, favoritism and nepotism; and,
4. The protection of human rights, which will for the first time, include a constitutional guarantee of socio-economic rights of all Fijians.

Our preparation for the General Election next year is now well advanced. My government is engaging the international community in this process. We will ensure that the election will not only be free and fair, but conducted to the highest international standards.

Honourable Prime Minister, Fiji has a vibrant tourism industry, which has been one of the main drivers of growth in our economy and a major employer of our people. I hope that your government will encourage as many Russians as possible to visit Fiji and experience the unique attractions that our country has to offer. We have a range of products for all ages and tastes, from maritime activities such as fishing and deep sea diving to super yacht cruising and weddings and honeymoons in some of the most romantic settings on earth.

I trust that with the signing today of the Fiji/Russia Mutual Visa Exemption Agreement, that we will attract increasing numbers of visitors from Russia, as well as investors in the tourism sector of the Fijian economy.

Trade & Investment

Honourable Prime Minister, trade and investment is a mainstay of our economy, as it is for yours. Whilst we may not, until now, have fully explored the trade and investment opportunities between our two countries, we believe the deepening relationship should pave the way for our respective private sectors to explore this potential. Fiji offers some unique and niche products for the Russian market, while it presents, to the Russians, investment opportunities and a market for Russian products. Whilst Fiji is small compared to Russia in size and population, it is a modern nation-state with generous Government incentives, a vibrant banking sector that is linked to the international banking system, excellent transport links by sea and air and a well-educated workforce. Given that Fiji is the hub of the South Pacific, it presents to Russian investors and manufacturers a perfect base to explore export opportunities in the rest of the region using Fiji as a base. I strongly urge that a trade and investment mission from Russia visit Fiji.

 Mutual Friendship

I note that one of the pillars of Russian foreign policy is to build an official “friendship” programme with countries in various regions of the world. May I suggest that Fiji and Russia deepen their bilateral engagements, especially when it comes to sporting and cultural exchanges. These two areas of activity directly involve the ordinary peoples of our countries. I firmly believe that for any friendship to be healthy and sustainable, we need to have direct engagement between individuals. Russians and Fijians share a keen love of sport, as we are seeing with the current World Cup Rugby Sevens Championship in Moscow. So I believe that we have ample opportunity to build friendships and should do so.

Russia is also a country with a rich musical and artistic tradition, which Fijians can learn from. The same is true when it comes to Fijian culture, which is arguably the most vibrant in the Pacific. We need cultural exchanges to enrich our understanding of each other.

Review of outcomes

Before I conclude, I would like to review – from the Fijian perspective - the outcome of our meetings today. In this great and historical capital, we witnessed the first ever personal encounter between a Prime Minister of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Fiji. This is a milestone in our bilateral relationship and we can be justifiably proud of this occasion. I again thank you, Honourable Prime Minister, for your gracious invitation to visit your country.

We also witnessed the signing of five bilateral agreements which set out the framework and establish the guidelines for cooperation between our two countries in the following areas:

1. Military and Technical Cooperation;
2. Mutual Visa Exemption ;
3. Cooperation in tackling money laundering, the proceeds of crime and the financing of Terrorism;
4. Public Health; and
5. Exchanges between our universities.

I believe that we have secured all of the outcomes we set out to achieve during this historic visit. So once again, I thank you, Prime Minister, and all the senior officials of your government for making this visit a great success.

In conclusion, I once again reiterate the support of my government for our mutual endeavours that have been agreed on during this visit, in the United Nations and in other international fora. I thank you again for hosting this excellent lunch and I wish the Russian Sevens Rugby Team success in the World Cup Championship.

 Vinaka vakalevu, (Russian equivalent), thank you.