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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**

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF SUVA SEA WALL RECREATIONAL AREA**

**Queen Elizabeth Drive Thurs. 7th Nov, 2013**

**SUVA 1700 Hours**

Attorney General and Acting Minister for Local Government;

The Special Administrator of Suva;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

I’m delighted to be here for the opening of this project – the latest phase of the Suva City Council’s ongoing program to beautify and rejuvenate our capital.

This is clearly more than just another park but a multi-purpose recreational area built to international standards that is a wonderful addition to the city.

Generations of families have always picnicked along the harbour foreshore. But never before have they been able to enjoy such a great facility.

It fills me with pride every time I see something that enhances our beloved capital – Suva.

Because this is not just a place to live for so many Fijians, but the centre of our national life.

Any capital city should be a statement to the world about a nation’s values.

And while Suva has always enjoyed a magnificent harbourside setting, I think we can all agree that as a nation, we allowed it to slip.

Instead of proper care and attention, Suva was allowed to fade, first around the edges and then through more serious neglect.

We simply didn’t do enough to put in the effort that our capital city needs and deserves.

Some of our most important buildings deteriorated seriously over the years…some of our once magnificent gardens were allowed to wither.

And many of Suva’s roads became not just an embarrassment but a serious hazard.

When anything is neglected, people also don’t treat it with the respect it deserves.

So our once great capital became a place littered with rubbish.

When a city is neglected, its citizens also lose pride in it and don’t see why they should pay for its maintenance.

Well, I’m pleased to say all that has ended. My Government has set Suva on a course to be great again, to be a capital worthy of our vision to make Fiji great again, to be a place that fills Fijians with pride.

This recreational area is just part of a concerted program to fulfill that aim.

I want the families who gather here and the children who play here to be proud of Suva, be proud of our Nation. That pride must also translate into keeping our surrounding clean and looking after our environment.

Of course not every place in Fiji can have a park of this standard, but it sets a standard for the whole country. A benchmark of excellence for the new Fiji.

During the past six years, we have put a lot of effort into rural development - which had been badly neglected by previous governments – but are increasingly turning our attention to improving our urban centres.

That means upgrading the markets in our towns and cities, providing more garbage trucks, investing in better sporting facilities and putting a lot more emphasis on the aesthetics of where we live, which is what this park is all about.

I urge every citizen to treat it with respect, as if it is their own backyard, to enjoy it and protect it. It is a place to gather, to play, to “talanoa” and to dream of a better life for ourselves and our Nation.

Of course, all over Suva, we can see the transformation of our beloved capital.

Next year, the grand old lady of Suva – the Grand Pacific Hotel – emerges from its makeover to once again regain its place as the most legendary hotel in the South Pacific.

Government Buildings are being cleaned and floodlit and much of the inside is being painstakingly restored.

And tonight, I can announce that we are finally fixing the clock atop the Government tower, yes not just getting it going again but working properly so we can set our own watches and clocks by it. And fixing its chimes so they again ring out over Suva, a sound that hasn’t been heard for a generation.

And all around the city, projects are either being completed or are underway – the restoration of Terry Walk and the *“Little Venice”* along Nabukulou Creek…

The harbourside walkway from the Suva Civic Centre to the markets…

major improvements to the markets themselves for the benefit of shoppers and those who sell their produce there…

the extension of the sea wall walkway all the way from the city to Suva Point….

and of course, the roadworks that are now being conducted all over Suva as part of my Government’s program to fix Fiji’s roads.

Only a few hours ago this afternoon, I opened the first of the 33 units at Lagilagi commonly known as the Jittu Estate. My Government's commitment to improving squatter areas will contribute to not only improving the quality of the lives of those squatters but also beautify those areas.

I also urge business houses to compliment and join the upgrade and beautification projects by improving the standard and outlook of their shops and buildings. Your small investment in your buildings, by painting it or cleaning it will not only make Suva a better and attractive City, but it of course will increase the value of your properties given in particular all the investment in infrastructure by my Government.

I want to pay tribute this evening to the efforts of the Suva City Council and especially Chandu Umaria, the city’s Special Administrator.

He has brought drive and commitment to the task of restoring Suva’s fortunes and he and his team deserve our thanks.

Crucially, he has been willing to take the tough decision to get the rate-payers of Suva to face up to their own responsibilities for the city’s welfare by paying their outstanding debts.

We must always remember that Suva will only be as good as the willingness of its ratepayers to maintain the city and work in partnership with the Council and the business community to restore civic pride.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a time to celebrate Suva, our capital.

This recreational area is a wonderful addition to the city and I have great pleasure in officially declaring it open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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