

**COMMODORE JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF(Mil), OStJ, MSD, jssc, psc**

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

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

**OPENING ADDRESS AT THE ITAUKEI LAND TRUST BOARD ANNUAL STRATEGIC CORPORATION PLANNING WORKSHOP**

**Warwick Resort Tues. 5th Nov., 2013**

**CORAL COAST 0950 Hours**

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

Members of the Board of Trustees of TLTB;

General Manager and other staff of TLTB;

Invited guests representing Government Agencies.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I am again pleased to be part of the Annual Strategic Corporate Planning Workshop, the purpose of which is to strategize a coordinated and effective work plan for the iTaukei Land Trust Board (“TLTB”).

It’s an important opportunity to share with you some salient thoughts as Chairman of TLTB and as Prime Minister, the Government's expectations on how the TLTB can focus better on its core role as the ***"Trustee"*** for all iTaukei landowners in Fiji, in the new Fiji.

Your strategic plan must be guided by these thoughts and expectations – to ensure you deliver on them. Indeed as trustees you have a fiduciary duty to the beneficiaries, the landowners, who in fact you are answerable to.

With 91 per cent of the country’s land surface owned by the iTaukei and now protected and guaranteed in an unprecedented manner under our new Constitution, TLTB clearly needs to make a paradigm shift to truly create and enhance opportunities for the landowners and by natural extension to all other Fijians.

Increased opportunities for landowners means TLTB staff and management working efficiently and effectively; it means encouraging the usage of land for productive use; it means the TLTB staff being aware of and understanding the symbiotic relationship between availability of land and the commercial, financial and economic realities and opportunities; it means viewing land as an asset to be utilized so that the landowners reap benefits and simultaneously grow the Fijian economy.

This means a shift in the mindset of the TLTB staff and management, from being a bureaucratic institution to one that facilitates, to one that recognizes through its attitude and actions that it is a critical development partner. Not an organization that works in a vacuum but one that is a team player – a team player for Team Fiji.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have said to a number of Fijian businessmen, who are always keen to have high margins on every transaction, that they would be better off if they targeted lower margins because by doing so they would have more sales or a higher turnover. This in turn would also generate sustained economic growth and prosperity which would benefit all including them, again. So making a kill in one sale is a very short term view, it strangles true growth and denies opportunities.

In same manner TLTB needs to change its approach to the leasing of land, to the management of tenants and potential tenants and of course landowners. Your approach for example to land lease rates should be realistic and you need to look at the look term and big picture. If you lease lands or renew leases at reasonable rates without unrealistic conditions, you will create economic activity. By creating economic activity you will in turn create long term and increased value for those very lands which the landowner will benefit from.

But the benefit is not only in the increased value in the asset base - when there is increased economic activity everyone benefits, more jobs are created, there is a demand for input from small to medium enterprises. Government also collects more revenue through direct and indirect taxes and it in turn uses that money to build better infrastructure and services like roads, electricity, education, telecommunications, hospitals, medical centers and drinking water.

This is what I need you to think about when strategizing. What you need to understand is that your actions can determine how well we do as a nation. What I need you to understand is the basic economic implication of your actions or for that matter, inaction.

On this note I must say that when I have been around Fiji there have been instances when potential tenants who want to lease land at the right value, TLTB staff have been very lethargic. They are not proactive in assisting potential tenants to, for example identify land. They want the potential tenant to look for land themselves. Such staff is not only are failing in customer service but are undermining the land owners - who are in fact their bosses - by depriving the land owner of income and economic activity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, TLTB must also position itself in the context of the new Fijian Constitution.

The Constitution expressly recognizes the iTaukei, the ownership of iTaukei lands, and the unique iTaukei culture, customs, traditions and language. For the first time, the Constitution, and its Bill of Rights, provides express protection for the ownership of iTaukei lands, which shall always remain with the customary owners and which shall under no circumstances be permanently alienated, whether by sale, grant, transfer or exchange. The Constitution goes further to state for the first time in our history that any iTaukei land which is acquired by the State for a particular public purpose must revert to the customary owners if that land is no longer required by the State for that specific purpose.

These provisions will ensure that iTaukei land can no longer be converted and sold as freehold land, as was done under the previous Governments, without objection from TLTB, in the case of Momi and Denarau.

Also for the first time, the owners of customary land and customary fishing grounds are entitled to receive a fair share of royalties with respect to any minerals extracted from their customary land or fishing grounds.

But we also now have socio-economic rights built into the Constitution which fulfills our objective to mainstream Fijians who are marginalized to.

At the same time, my Government is firmly committed to ensuring that individual members of landowning units receive an equal and fair share of all income generated from any iTaukei land. All Mataqali members must have equal access and benefit to the proceeds from the Mataqali land leases. With the current work being carried out by the Government’s ITC Services, equal distribution will be fully implemented and automated by the beginning of next year. TLTB must give full co-operation and priority to this critical national initiative.

Protection for landowners through protection of ownership and now a requirement to have fair and equitable rent paid to land owners compliments the constitutional protection for the rights and interests of land lessees and tenants. No law must diminish or adversely affect those rights and interests. Lessees and tenants also have the right not to have their leases and tenancies arbitrarily and illegally terminated.

TLTB also has competition now. Through the Land Use Decree a number of iTaukei landowning units have deposited their lands into the Land Bank. Some landowners are doing so because they believe its easier to deal with the Land Bank unit while some tenants prefer to lease land through the land bank unit because the unit is more customer focused. TLTB should in this respect seek to improve its positioning.

Ladies and Gentleman I have this morning highlighted to you some key issues, changes and challenges that you need to be aware of.

TLTB must remodel itself to be become more savvy, more client focused and customer focused. TLTB must understand modern economics. It must not be politicized nor play politics – as others have done in the past. It must fulfill its fiduciary duty to its beneficiaries, the landowners, with utter most transparency and professionalism. It must not be corrupt nor should it treat the landowners and tenants with indifference.

Ladies and Gentlemen you play a critical role in our country. We look forward to you making that difference in the new Fiji. I rely on you as does the rest of Fiji.

With those remarks, I wish all participants successful deliberations in this Workshop. I now declare the Strategic Planning Workshop open.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank You.

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