**FIJIAN PRIME MINISTER JV BAINIMARAMA’S TALKING POINTS**

**WITH RUSSIAN PRIME MINISTER DMITRY MEDVEDEV**

**MOSCOW RUSSIA 28 JUNE 2013**

Bula vinaka, (Russian equivalent) Honourable Prime Minister, thank you for your invitation to make this official visit to your amazing country – the Russian Federation. It is an enormous pleasure to be here and to be meeting with you.

I also thank you and your Government for the generous hospitality extended to me and members of my delegation. We warmly appreciate the arrangements that have been made for us.

Honourable Prime Minister, there are several issues I want to raise with you at this meeting. I sincerely hope you will consider them favourably. I know that some of the issues I raise may require further and more detailed discussions between our respective officials. But I hope that we can at least agree today on the appropriate way forward.

  Item One: The need to deepen & regularise high level political exchanges

I want to place on record the sincere appreciation of my Government and the people of Fiji for the support and assistance we have received from your Government in so many fields of cooperation and development. I hope that we can undertake further exchanges at ministerial and senior government level in all areas of our bilateral cooperation. The Fijian Government is also ready to welcome members of the Russian business community who want to explore trade and investment opportunities with their counterparts in Fiji.

In this regard, Prime Minister, we understand the need for continuing political exchanges at the highest level. In February 2012, I hosted Mr Sergey LAVROV – your Foreign Minister - in Fiji and similar ministerial visits would be welcomed by my government. I also hope - Honorable Prime Minister - that you will be able to come and visit Fiji in the not too distant future.

Item two: Russian support & cooperation with Fiji at the United Nations

First of all, I want to convey to you the deepest appreciation of my government and all the people of Fiji for your support at the United Nations. We are especially grateful for your assistance in defending Fiji’s continued participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions . We greatly value your understanding and support.

In the past three years, regular bilateral consultations have taken place between our respective foreign ministers on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly meetings in New York.

Fiji also acknowledges the support it is receiving from your Government at the United Nations in the following areas:

      Climate change and adaptation

Peacekeeping & peace building

The fight against terrorism

Human Trafficking and natural disaster management

Item three: Committing the Fijian Government to support Russia’s bid for the World Expo 2020.

As Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, I have great pleasure in conveying to you that Fiji supports the Russian Federation’s bid to host the World Expo 2020. We seek your advice on how to assist you to make a successful bid.

 Item Four: Fiji requests Russian support for the Pacific Islands Development Forum

Honourable Prime Minister, we know that Russia is a friend of the peoples of the countries of the South Pacific. For several years, the Russian partnership at the United Nations with senior diplomats of the Pacific Small Island Developing States [PSIDS] has provided an excellent opportunity to exchange views about development issues.

Russia has gained a firsthand opportunity to hear the concerns and frustrations of the PSIDS countries about their relationships with certain developed nations in the region. These countries employ cheque-book diplomacy to try to hijack our attempts to develop a “future of our choice”. They also attempt to sidetrack us by making promises that are subsequently not honoured. This is evident in the current debates on climate change and adaptation at the UN and in other international forums. These have been dragging on now for far too long. In the meantime, those of us who are suffering from sea level rises on a daily basis have been left completely by the wayside.

In August this year [2013], Fiji will be hosting the inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum. We are expecting Heads of Government and senior political leaders from all the Pacific Island States to be represented. We are also sending invitations to representatives of many countries outside the region, asking them to attend.

I extend a formal invitation to you, Prime Minister, to send a senior Russian political leader to attend this important summit. We also seek a contribution from Russia towards this project.

I thank you for your consideration.

Item five: Deepening cultural bilateral exchanges

Honourable Prime Minister, we note that your Government’s foreign policy has many goals, including the creation of ‘Russia’s friends’ in most regions of the world. As part of a common partnership in ‘soft diplomacy’, Fiji would like to explore the opportunity to be the hub for the ‘Russia’s Friend’ initiative in the South Pacific. This would involve cultural, artistic, musical and educational exchanges. We also seek participation in national and international exhibitions in these sectors.

Six: Defence and security cooperation

Honourable Prime Minister, after the signing today of the Agreement In the Sphere of Military and Technical Cooperation, our respective national authorities will move quickly to explore how specific projects may be undertaken for the mutual benefit of our countries.

For Fiji’s part, we see this Agreement as providing opportunities in specialised areas of security and military training and technical assistance. We are fully committed to undertake UN peacekeeping and peace-building missions. As you know, these are costly and I hope that Russia will be able to partner with us and provide assistance to enhance our participation in this area.

Seven: Cooperation in Sport & Sports Sciences

At the next meeting between our countries, Fiji wants to raise its desire to seek cooperation with the Russian Government in the area of sports and sports science. I hope that your Government will be able to assist us develop the raw talent that exists in Fiji in almost every class of sports:

      Boxing;

      Swimming;

      Rugby – Union and League

      Soccer

      Golfing and other mainstream sports.

In particular, we seek cooperation and assistance in the field of Sports Sciences and Nutrition. In today’s highly competitive sports environment, sports psychology/psychiatry and nutritional sciences are critical to the success of our sports men and women. My country sends many professional sports people overseas each year to compete in various fields. In return we receive financial remittances from them. They send much of the money they earn to support their families in Fiji and in doing so, contribute significantly to our annual foreign exchange earnings.

We thank you and your government for agreeing to discuss ways to cooperate and assist our sports men and women. I hope that we will soon be able to sign an agreement on this issue.

Eight: Tourism and investment promotion and the need for appropriate infrastructure.

Honourable Prime Minister, in my meeting with your Foreign Minister, Sergey LAVROV, in Fiji in February 2012, he specifically asked me to allow Fiji and Russia to put in place a mutual visa exemption for citizens of our two countries. He told me that it would be the single most important driver for promoting Fijian tourism in Russia. As you know, we will be signing that Agreement later today.

I seek your support for two important measures to create a framework to support Russian investment in Fiji in tourism and other areas such as mining and agriculture. We would like to begin negotiations on:

i)               A double taxation agreement and

ii)    An air services agreement.

Again these are issues that will be discussed in some detail at the follow up meeting later on.

As I conclude, Honourable Prime Minister, may I again thank you for your active consideration of the issues I have raised in our meeting. I hope that you will be able to visit Fiji in the not too distant future.

Vinaka vakalevu. (Russian Equivalent) and thank you.