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**Hon. Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

**PRIME MINISTER’S NEW YEAR ADDRESS 2015**

Pre-recorded Televised Address New Year’s Day

My Fellow Fijians,

Bula vinaka and a very Happy New Year to you all.

Once again, another year is upon us. And as we move into 2015, we can all reflect on the achievements of the past year and our hopes for the future – both for ourselves and our families and our beloved nation.

No Fijian can doubt the importance of 2014 – by any standards, a monumental year in our history.

It was the year in which we embarked on our new and true democracy, a year in which Fijians voted overwhelmingly for a new beginning.

In our landmark election on 17 September, we decisively turned our backs as a nation on the divisions of the past and opted instead for an inclusive future of hope and great promise.

By embracing a common and equal citizenry and declaring every citizen a Fijian, the Fijian people rejected the voices of disunity among us and set us on a new path.

In the process, we shattered many of the assumptions about politics in Fiji – that it would always be race-based and favour the elite. We drew a line under the politics of fear and showed we were no longer prepared to be manipulated. We voted for unity, for equal opportunity for every Fijian no matter who we are or where we come from. And in doing so, we have finally given ourselves a shot at true nationhood. One Fiji with freedom and justice for all.

It was a genuine turning point in our nation’s fortunes and we are already reaping the benefits as the rest of the world recognises our remarkable achievement.

It is a wonderful privilege for me to have been given your confidence and trust to take us forward. But this has been your victory - a victory of common sense and decency and a vote of confidence in a better future for ourselves and generations of Fijians to come.

My fellow citizens, the challenge now is to capitalize on the events of the past few months. To build on our education revolution. To build on the improvements in our infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water. To build on the advantage my Government has created of a vastly improved economy growing by more than four per cent a year.

There is still much to be done to catch up as a nation on the lost years. The years we squandered arguing about who deserved more when we should have been building a better future for everyone. The years in which selfish elites put their own interests above the common good and ordinary Fijians were deprived of some of the necessities and opportunities of life.

In 2014, we put those years behind us. And in the coming year, we are spending more than 3 billion dollars to move our nation forward, around a third of that improving our infrastructure.

To the many thousands of Fijians affected by water cuts in recent times, I want to say this: For 50 years, successive governments neglected to maintain or replace our pipes. But on the back of our growing economy, I am determined to finally fix the problem once and for all. The same goes for our roads and bridges and our transport links with maritime communities, who didn’t see a new ship for nearly 40 years until we came along.

And so my fellow Fijians….

The coming year will be about putting the proper structures in place to carry us into the future. The proper structures in our economy to maintain the growth we are now experiencing; the proper infrastructure to keep trade flowing and improve our export earnings; the proper restructuring of the Civil Service to make it more efficient and improve its ability to serve our needs.

All this is to fulfill our vision of Fiji as a truly modern nation-state in which a population that is better educated can get jobs that are better paid and more satisfying; in which Fijian-made goods become a byword for quality the world over; in which Fiji cements its place as a pre-eminent Pacific Island nation and a respected voice in the world.

We were greatly blessed in 2014 when 45 of our UN Peacekeepers were freed after two weeks in captivity in Syria. Their courage and fortitude impressed us all and impressed the world. And it underlined our importance to the global community - a small Pacific Island state able and willing to serve in troubled parts of the world and doing so with courage and distinction.

My fellow Fijians,

All in all, 2014 was a magnificent year for Fiji. As we turn our eyes to 2015, I am personally convinced that greatness lies over the horizon. And we have our sights set as a Government on taking us there. It is traditionally a time for resolutions, so today let us make some together as a nation.

Let us resolve to remain united. Let us be patriotic - to love our nation and put its interests above our own. And let us love and care for each other, and especially those among us who are less fortunate.

As our economy improves, it is they who deserve more of our national resources. And I’m proud that in our spending priorities for the year ahead, so many are aimed at poverty alleviation and creating sustained livelihoods.

As the old year gives way to the new, let us, above all, thank God for our many blessings and rededicate ourselves to the task of building a better Fiji.

Wherever you are on this New Year’s Day, I wish you all a very happy and prosperous 2015.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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