

**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 NATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR FIJI’S TRADE POLICY FRAMEWORK**

Holiday Inn Fri. 13th Sept., 2013

SUVA 0930 Hours

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**The Attorney General and Minister for Industry and Trade;**

**Permanent Secretaries;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning.

I returned yesterday from a very successful tour of Vanua Levu, during which I opened another five of the Government’s new Telecentres to add to the 15 already established in other parts of Fiji.

These Telecentres are a cornerstone of my Government’s program to provide better services to ordinary Fijians – in this instance, giving them access to the information and communications revolution sweeping the rest of the world.

In the wake of my trip, close to 40,000 Fijians now have regular access to these Telecentres and use of the Internet and the Worldwide Web. Inevitably, they are going to be better informed as a result.

We are empowering them as part of our vision to be the powerhouse of economic activity in the region. Because that activity and the resulting prosperity that will flow to all our people can only come if Fiji becomes a smart country, an educated country, an informed country – a country able to adapt quickly to changes in our world, recognise the opportunities and seize them.

This is absolutely essential in order to become a modern, dynamic State. By becoming smarter, better educated, better informed, all facets of our reform agenda will benefit, including what we’re trying to do to grow trade, build our economy, and create jobs.

You’re all aware of my Government’s campaign to improve the economy generally through tax cuts, investment incentives and better infrastructure – better roads and faster turnaround times in our ports.

It’s very gratifying to see that effort finally paying off. Our economic growth has been revised upwards to 3.2 per cent, the best result since 2004. The naysayers have been proven wrong. Fiji is on the move again. Fiji is attracting more investment. More jobs are being created. There’s a new mood of confidence in the country. And a much greater sense of optimism as we move towards the first democratic election in our history next year.

Our Constitution guarantees basic socio-economic rights for all Fijians, such as the right to economic participation and the right of adequate health, education, food and clean water.

This provides the foundation for adopting a pragmatic and inclusive Framework on Trade Policy, which promotes Fijian jobs and improves the living standards of all Fijians.

Our vision is to serve as the hub of the Pacific, to be able to compete internationally in all facets of our economy.

This National Workshop is part of the Government’s commitment to deepen co-operation and co-ordination between stakeholders. To be our best, we all have to be on the same page. We need a single vision.

We are all gathered here to finalise the trade policy framework to ensure how we - as *“Fiji Incorporated,” or “Team Fiji”* – can maximise our international trade by working together more effectively.

If we are ever to achieve our ambitious aims as a regional and international trading heavyweight, we have to think differently, outside the box as I’m fond of saying. Not just do things the way they’ve always been done but start afresh.

This Trade Policy Framework will capitalise on the positive reforms we've already made and improve the general business environment and trade related infrastructure.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin with some internal housekeeping.

I have to say that I’m deeply disappointed that some sections of Government have been dragging their feet in embracing this initiative.

I want them to know that there is no doubt – no doubt at all – that the path towards integration of trade policy between all Ministries and Departments – as proposed by this Framework – is the way forward. The only way forward.

I want more co-ordination. I want everyone to get with the framework. Because – as representatives of the same Government – we need to work towards the common goal of improving our trade performance. It’s as simple as that.

We need a shift away from the bureaucratic turf wars. We also need to realise that we are a team, not individual agencies working in isolation. All agencies need to realise that they are there to facilitate, not obstruct. All agencies need to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the nation. We need this to happen now.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Government also needs to make sure that it works effectively with the private sector. We must seize every opportunity to form effective public-private partnerships, and together contribute to a shared vision.

The National Workshop for Fiji’s Trade Policy Framework is an inclusive and pragmatic approach to enhancing our trade. It’s the paradigm shift necessary to ensure that all segments of the economy, all arms of Government work together, not against one another.

Put simply, it is in our shared interest to enhance Fiji’s position in global trade and assume our natural place as the trade hub of the Pacific.

This Framework will determine how to *“connect all the dots”* and address our production capacity, and supply-side constraints with the ultimate objective of enhancing Fiji’s position in global trade.

Harnessing our opportunities in international trade will mean more demand for Fijian-made goods and services leading to increased investment from the private sector and the creation of jobs and wealth.

That means a better general effort to identify new opportunities. That means every Fijian – Government, business and workers – taking responsibility to keep the national economy in the best possible shape. And make things and provide services that people elsewhere want to buy and keep buying.

Because only with a strong national economy and a healthy export trade can we hope to ultimately raise the standards of all Fijians, to put an end to the poverty and give every Fijian child hope for a better and more sustainable future.

It is not someone else’s responsibility. It is not the Government’s responsibility alone. It is not the private sector’s responsibility alone. It is not the responsibility of our workers alone. It is the responsibility of all of us – working together as one nation, one team – to make Fiji stronger.

So the main task before you at this Workshop is to strengthen and deepen the support, co-operation and co-ordination of every stakeholder for the Trade Policy Framework and our national economy.

Fijians don’t want to hear excuses. They want to see results. And that means changing mindsets, getting rid of some of the attitudes and practices that have held us back, including crushing bureaucracy. We need a better developed attitude of serving people’s needs rather than tying them up in bundles of red tape.

The whole emphasis of our collective effort should be to remove inefficiency, eliminate waste and improve productivity. We need to streamline processes, we need to avoid duplication, we need faster implementation of good ideas rather than excuses about why it’s all too hard.

Over the next two days, you’ll be considering a report – prepared after consultations with all the stakeholders – that identifies Fiji’s trade requirements, capacity and constraints. Consider it carefully and improve on it where you can.

We’re also setting up a Multi Stakeholder Council – chaired by the Minister for Industry and Trade – to give each stakeholder an important role in determining our co-ordination effort. I hope you will all also give that the serious consideration it deserves. Because this is your chance to present your ideas on trade matters direct to me and my Cabinet and contribute to our policy settings.

We’re putting our money where our mouth is by allocating $164,000 in the 2014 Budget to implement this initiative and also by providing adequate staffing to the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

Finally Ladies and Gentlemen, my Government recognises the need for increased trade representation in some of Fiji’s key trading partners to boost our overall effort.

We don’t have a trade representative in our largest trading partners, Australia and the Pacific Islands, which combined accounts for 40% of Fiji’s total trade.

So it stands to reason that we have enormous untapped potential in Australia and the Pacific Region that we are still to capitalise on, especially in the manufacturing sector.

We clearly need to open a Trade Commission in a strategic location in Australia and also possibly appoint a roving Trade Commissioner to the Pacific.

And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, I ask everyone in this room to commit themselves to this process, a genuine partnership to improve Fiji’s trading performance and raise the living standards of all Fijians.

And with that, I wish you well in your deliberations.

Vinaka vakalevu and thank you.

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