

**Commodore J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**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 RFMF 01/14 PASSOUT PARADE**

**Force Training Group Fri 14th Feb, 2014**

**NASINU 1000 Hours**

**The Commanding Officer of the Force Training Group;**

**Parade Commander and the Training Team;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very Good Morning to You All.

I’m delighted to be here as Chief Guest for a very special and memorable occasion. We’re here to witness the Passing Out Parade of 256 young men into the RFMF. But it’s also my last parade as your Commander before I step down from the military at the end of this month to lead my political movement and contest the upcoming General Election.

First of all, I would like to thank the men on parade this morning for a fine display of marching and arms drill. I commend you all for the effort you have clearly put into the preparation of this parade. You are a splendid sight and a credit to yourselves and to the RFMF.

Three months ago, you walked into the training school as young men doubtless unsure of what would lie ahead and probably with a degree of apprehension. Today, you will march out as proud soldiers ready to serve Fiji, its people and the interests of our beloved nation. I want to congratulate you all for having successfully completed your period of training. For most of you, it will have been challenging but also a very rewarding lifetime experience.

Today you complete a vigorous thirteen week program of classroom lectures, skills training and jungle exercises. Today you are all fully fledged members of the RFMF. The training you have undergone will have instilled in you the need for discipline, obedience and the highest standards of personal conduct and behaviour. You are role models for the entire nation and it’s vitally important for you to demonstrate these qualities at all times. We rely on you to maintain these standards for your entire career with the RFMF. You are now part of an elite force with a wonderful tradition of service to the Fijian people. Never forget that it is your duty to serve and to put the interests of our nation before anything else.

After today, most of you will be posted to the Territorial Force Brigade, where you will be expected to assist the Regular Force soldiers in carrying out any RFMF task either in Fiji or abroad. From today, you assume an enormous responsibility, both in a personal sense and as a member of our great Force. You need to be prepared to answer the call of duty at any time. You also need to keep yourselves fully informed of developments in our nation's affairs. Remember that whatever you do and wherever you are, you must always put the nation’s interests before your own. You must put Fiji first.

As you know, the RFMF has intensified its service to the Nation since 2006. We are playing a vital role in the effort to create a modern and progressive nation state. The RFMF has a clear vision for a better Fiji in which all its citizens have access to the same level of opportunity. We seek justice for every Fijian, not just for an elite. We stand shoulder to shoulder with every citizen no matter who they are. We will fight corruption at every turn. We will always stand for the very best Fijian quality of caring for our fellow citizens as together we work to rebuild and reshape our Nation.

I want to remind you all that greatness in the RFMF is not measured in your years of service or the rank you attain. Greatness is measured by the sacrifice you are willing to make for the good of our Nation. As members of the RFMF, it is your duty to keep the oath of allegiance which you have pledged to uphold at all times.

As I said at the start, this passing out parade today is a special occasion for me – the last time I will officiate at such a parade as Commander of the RFMF. It is a job that I have held for the last 15 years. It is a job I have come to love and will treasure for the rest of my life. I have thoroughly enjoyed my 39 years of my service in the RFMF. I have made lifelong friends and had the most interesting, sometimes remarkable, experiences. I am proud to have been called to lead our soldiers and sailors for the last 15 years. It has been my privilege to lead and my privilege to serve.

My long career taught me many things but above all, made me realise the importance of camaraderie, friendship and building close personal relationships with others. We need to depend on each other, to trust each other, to work together as a team no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. I urge you all to look after one another, be loyal to each other and above all, be loyal to the RFMF and the great Nation you serve.

The RFMF will only be able to tackle the challenges ahead if those who are charged with leading it are united and unwavering in their resolve to succeed. Our values have been built by those men and women who came before us. They taught us that unity of purpose and loyalty to our institution and country is more important than anything else. Live by those values yourself and be steadfast in defending them. Pass them on to the generations to come. If you live by these principles – of putting Fiji first - you will never go wrong.

We have succeeded in bringing about changes to our Nation. We have set a new Constitution in place – a great Constitution - and are now forging ahead on the universal principles of fairness and justice that it encompasses.

The 2013 Constitution enshrines principles and values that give voice to the collective aspirations of all Fijians and guarantees political and social rights for every individual. On this Constitution - which embodies the vision and values of the RFMF – we are building a new and better Fiji for all. It is a blueprint for a united and prosperous Fiji where everyone shares a common identity. We are all Fijians and share the same rights and obligations. It is our duty to uphold this Constitution at all times. Indeed, it is our sacred trust to do so for the sake of every Fijian.

As you are all aware, in September this year we will hold the first genuine democratic election in Fiji’s history, of one person, one vote, one value, based on our new Constitution. It is wonderful to see that nearly 90 per cent of all eligible voters in Fiji have already registered electronically to vote. That alone is a great vote of confidence in the new course we all began to chart in 2006.

As you all know, I have made the decision to stand in this year’s election to fight for the principles we all believe in as a civilian in the new Parliament. To do so, the Constitution requires me to step down as your Commander and I will be leaving the Military on the 28th of February.

The appointment of a new Commander will not change the course we have charted in building a better Fiji for all. Do not allow yourselves to be manipulated by external pressures and influences. We need to be united now more than ever.

As Territorial Force soldiers, be just, be firm and steadfast. In the challenging and exciting times that we are facing in our country, the RFMF plays a vital role in maintaining law and order. There may be obstacles in our path but we will not be deterred from our mission of building a society that is fairer and more just. Today, you have all joined our great cause. It is not just for ourselves but for our children and future generations.

The RFMF has already deployed more than 500 troops for Peacekeeping Duties to the Golan Heights. They are there as part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) to maintain the ceasefire between the Israeli and Syrian forces and to supervise the implementation of the disengagement agreement.

Our soldiers are putting their lives on the line on the other side of the world. Not waging war but keeping the peace, ensuring the safety of others. Some of you here today may soon be called up for peacekeeping duties.

Remember you are now part of a Service renowned all over the world for its gallantry - servicemen and women who have fought and sometimes died on the battlefields of the world wars and on Peacekeeping Operations in volatile areas of the world. Put your months of endurance and pain into practice and go forth to uphold the high ideals forged through the years by your predecessors. Yours is not a job but a calling to serve your country with dignity, pride and with all your heart.

I once again congratulate the recipients of the various awards presented today. To the hardworking staff of the RFMF Force Training Group, thank you for the efforts in training these fine young men to be soldiers of the RFMF.

To family and friends, I would also like to acknowledge your assistance and support for your loved ones. I ask for your continued support as we write a new chapter in the glorious history of the RFMF.

Vinaka Vakalevu and God Bless you all.

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