

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

SPEECH AT THE SOLOMON ISLANDS 35TH NATIONAL DAY

 CELEBRATIONS

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Honiara Mon. 8th July, 2013

SOLOMON ISLANDS am

The Honourable Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Darcy Lilo;

Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen, and most importantly, people of the Solomon Islands.

I bring you greetings and say *“Bula Vinaka”* from the Government and People of Fiji as your country marks 35 years of independence.

Prime Minister, I was deeply honoured to have received your Government’s invitation to be your Special Guest at this happy occasion.

This is an occasion to remember the past. It is an occasion to contemplate and reflect on the future.

Above all, it is an occasion that calls for celebration.

The challenges your country has faced during these years of independence - and even prior to independence - have been enormous.

It takes resilience and determination to recover from the ravages of war as your nation did after World War II.

It is not easy and takes courage and cooperation amongst your people to face the challenges faced by crises in the last decade that spawned such bodies as RAMSI.

As well, it takes a robust and democracy-loving people to build a vibrant nation such as yours, as we witness today, and which we are all here to celebrate.

I say all these, because we have experienced the same realities in Fiji.

My country has also faced similar challenges.

We have suffered natural disasters.

We have suffered economic difficulties to the extent that we have had to devalue our currency.

We have also suffered international condemnation for trying to do the right thing by our people simply because it does not correspond with international norms.

Our challenges are enormous, which is why we identify so much with your country.

The struggles throughout our independence have not been without its tragedies and setbacks. Indeed, many challenges still lie ahead as our Governments set their respective courses that will address our unique challenges.

I, therefore, feel it my duty to express here my personal thanks and appreciation and that of my Government and the People of Fiji, for the steadfast support of the Solomon Islands Government it has shown over the past five years.

Your personal support and encouragement and that of the People of the Solomon Islands and our other Melanesian brothers and sisters have been one of the mainstays in our determination to achieve for our people a just society where everyone is equal and where discrimination and marginalization have no place.

Prime Minister, come to think of it… there are more than a dozen reasons for our two countries’ closeness, even allowing for our physical proximity.

Our traditional ties since the pre-colonial era remain one of our strongest links.

The substantial Fijian community in the Solomon Islands and vice versa reflects how long ago we started visiting each other’s shores for reasons traditional, educational, personal or otherwise.

Missionaries from Fiji made this country their home while imparting the Word of God.

Our people contributed to your nation’s recovery from the effects of World War 2.

The number of students from this country who have attended and are attending the University of the South Pacific in Suva would be well over a thousand now, graduating in law, medicine, engineering and other professions.

Our peacekeepers were deployed here following the Bougainville crisis and also for RAMSI.

These are but a few examples of the experiences that the two countries have shared.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise, ladies and gentlemen, to learn that even the national anthem of the Solomon Islands was composed by a Fijian.

This is the reason I feel privileged and honoured to be your Special Guest, for it was the bridges built by our respective predecessors and forbears that have made our relationship such a close and meaningful one.

Prime Minister… thank you again for your kind invitation. Rest assured that the Government and People of Fiji remain your ally and friend. I wish you and your Government well.

To the people of the Solomon Islands… after 35 years on independence, the future is yours. There will be challenges, but these are nothing that cannot be met by being united, recognizing our differences and managing to work with our similarities.

I wish you all well (Mi hamamasim yu pla olgeta).

Vinaka vakalevu.

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