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Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, National Planning, Public Service,

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My Fellow Fijians

Today marks a very special day. We are commemorating **International Day for the Eradication of Poverty** with the theme **“Working towards a World without Discrimination – Building on the expe­ri­ence and knowl­edge of peo­ple in extreme poverty.”**

The Government of Fiji has done a lot with our limited resources as we have implemented reforms to our social welfare system. We are shifting our resources towards social resources and development for quite some time now and ensuring that our country grows in order to sustain these progresses. At the same time we are taking special measures to address urgent needs of the poor. We have allocated more than $26.4million towards Poverty Eradication thus assist combat this challenge that affects us every day.

However, we must not be too dependent nor allow ourselves to support a culture of dependency. We must change our mentality and believe that poverty is only a temporary state. We should uphold the value of our sweat, be self-sufficient and confident. I am happy to say that some of those that had been assisted are now setting up their small businesses and are finding permanent employment. We have also invested $32million for the social protection programme that will assist the elderly and disabled especially with their bus fare.

As we are nearing the end of the year, let’s take a look back from the beginning of the year and see the achievements we have accumulated so far that have helped reduce poverty. So much has been done and we are blessed to be given this opportunity to review its progress.

Equally important is the emphasis on Anti-Poverty Programme opportunities for women, on participation by communities in their own upliftment, building capacity of our local authorities to work with National and Provincial departments to meet the needs of the community.

From what I have seen, in the implementation of Anti-Poverty programmes, it is clear that it is making a lasting difference where it matters most – to our rural areas. By concentrating on basic needs as access to roads, resource centers for women, shelter, water, school buildings and materials, electricity, scholarships, infrastructure for Agriculture, training, capacity building, etc…

These are the fruits of our dedication in strengthening partnership with local communities, not forgetting our foreign counterparts.

It touches my heart to see ordinary men and women from all walks of life seizing the opportunity to participate in shaping and building these community projects. In doing so, you are not only building assets for your communities but also a better life for your children, the next generation. Do not forget that in doing so, you are building our nation and making a living reality of bringing prosperity to the people it serves.

I wish to pay tribute to all those in national, provincial and local governments, communities and traditional leaders, who have worked together in implementing programmes to eradicate poverty.

Congratulations to you all!

Much as we take pride in our achievements, we are not to rest on our laurels and gear up for still greater efforts.

We will continue to encourage the private sector to join with rural communities in meeting their needs and results have been positive.

To sum up, I know it’s going to be a challenge and fully aware of the daunting task ahead but I believe that Fiji can do it. Together let’s turn our country into a land of opportunities.

Nobel Prize-winner Muhammed Yunus said, “Once poverty is gone, we’ll need to build museums to display its horrors to future generations. They’ll wonder why poverty continued so long in human society – how a few people could live in luxury while billions dwelt in misery, deprivation and despair.”

I am looking forward to that day.

Thank you.

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