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**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Public Service, People’s Charter and Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

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**OPENING OF NEW CLASSROOM BLOCK AT YASAWA HIGH SCHOOL**

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**Marou Village Thurs. 10th April, 2014**

**NAVITI 1500 Hours**

**Na Turaga na Tui Marou,**

**The Board, Head Teacher, Staff and Students of Yasawa High School,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

I’m delighted to be here in Marou Village, Naviti, to open this new classroom block, which replaces the one that was destroyed by Tropical Cyclone Evan on the 17th of December 2012.

It’s wonderful to see so many bright, young faces as we enjoy the brilliant sunshine today and reflect on how far we’ve come since that dark day 16 months ago.

It was a time of immense heartbreak for the people of the Yasawas.

We gave thanks to God as a nation that because we had prepared well for the onslaught of Evan, we were spared any loss of life. But it was still a traumatic event for all of you – the loss of many of your homes and possessions, the feeling of isolation and uncertainty and for our young people here, the loss of their classroom block.

I will never forget touring the Yasawas a week after the disaster, meeting the people, listening to what they had through and assessing the damage. More than anything else, I will never forget your determination to recover from the disaster, to rebuild your lives and rebuild your homes.

The whole of Fiji was inspired by the spirit of the people of the Yasawas – the way they faced the challenge posed by Evan with courage, optimism and strength.

Indeed, I was so personally impressed that I wanted that spirit to be commemorated in a lasting way. So now the name Yasawa is being carried to the great airports of the Asia Pacific on the side of our new Fiji Airways A330, Island of Yasawa-i-rara.

I want to express my thanks to all of you who have contributed to the rebuilding of these classrooms – to the RFMF engineers who supervised the project and the local community who provided the labour force.

There are many things that I am proud of about the RFMF, where I spent 39 years before I stood down as its Commander to contest the forthcoming general election. But there are few things that I am more proud of than the work our engineers have done for the benefit of ordinary Fijians around the country. To these fine men and women, vinaka vakalevu.

This project – which has cost $139-thousand – will benefit 131 students from eleven surrounding villages. I now want to say something to each of you young people.

There has never been a more exciting time to be a Fijian. You are growing up with more opportunity in 2014 than any child has had in Fijian history.

My Government has taken the pressure off your parents and is providing free schooling for the first time. They don’t have to pay your fees any longer here at high school. And if you want to go on to University to become a doctor or a teacher, or to a technical college to become a farmer or a carpenter or a mariner, we will pay for that too. You’ll be able to get a loan from the Government for this and pay us back when you start work.

But if you study hard and become one of the top 600 students, you will get a scholarship that you do not have to pay back. We also, under the Tertiary Education Scheme, provide living subsidies for those from low-income families.

It’s all about providing a better opportunity for you to gain the knowledge and skills you need to look after yourself and your own family when the time comes. But it’s also for the benefit of our nation- part of my Government’s vision to make Fiji a clever country and compete better against the rest of the world.

I want you all to think of yourselves as part of a team – Team Fiji – in which we all work together like a sporting team to put Fiji First.

And that means thinking like a team, everyone having a sense of belonging and of value. Because only when we start thinking as a team – as one nation, one Fiji – can we ever achieve our true potential.

I was very disappointed the other day when a prominent chief in the East referred to divisions between us – of kerosene never mixing with water, he said. He is fundamentally wrong. Whatever our background, wherever we come from, we all belong, we are all equal. And only by working together as one nation can Fiji truly be united, prosperous and fulfil its destiny - truly the way the world should be.

I want to say to every Fijian young person. Don’t embrace the old ways of thinking, the mentality that has held Fiji back. Embrace the future and our vision of every Fijian joining hands to develop our beloved nation and make Fiji great.

It doesn’t matter who you are or where you come from in the new Fiji. We all have the same chance to get on in life. And I want you to think far beyond your island home.

As you know, people from all over the world come to the Yasawas because they have become famous as a place to holiday – famous for their beauty and the friendly welcome of their people. But I want more people from the Yasawas and the rest of Fiji to also go out into the world, to expand their horizons and get jobs in other places.

If you have a good education, the world can be your oyster. So I urge all of you to dream big dreams and to work as hard as you can. We are giving you great opportunities. It is up to you to make the most of them. To pick up the ball and run.

For you, it all starts here in the classroom block behind me that many of your fathers – with the help of our RFMF engineers – have built for you. So I have great pleasure today in declaring this new building at the Yasawa High School open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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