**

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**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 OPENING OF FIJI’S CORRECTIONS SERVICE’S**

**NEW REMAND/DETENTION CENTRE**

**Suva Prison Tues. 23rd July, 2013**

**SUVA 1000 Hours**

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The Honourable Chief Justice of Fiji, Justice Anthony Gates; Cabinet Ministers;

Members of the Diplomatic Corp;

Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

Thank you for being here to witness the opening of Fiji’s new state-of-the-art Remand/Detention Centre, which represents one of my Government’s major capital projects.

Fiji has been long overdue for such a facility – to house certain individuals who have been arrested or charged with a crime, but who have not been convicted.

Our old facilities simply weren’t up to scratch. It’s no secret that there is severe over-crowding at Corrections institutions in the country and that this issue has called for action.

For many of us, the Prisons system is not something that we think about often, and when we do, it’s mainly in terms of national security.

I can assure you that ensuring the safety of the Fijian people is one of my Government’s main priorities, and something we take very seriously.

But as a Government, and as a society, we also have an obligation to those who have fallen ill of the law. There are international standards and best practices that must be adhered to and upheld.

One, as I have already mentioned, is to reduce overcrowding in prisons.

Another is to make sure that remand prisoners are not mixed in with convicted criminals. The legal concept of *“innocent until proven guilty”* is a cornerstone of our legal system, and is something that should be reflected in our Prisons systems.

We must provide adequate remand facilities that are separate from our prisons.

The bottom line is a commitment to ensuring that all Fijians’ human dignity remains intact.

This new facility is a huge step in the right direction. This new $11.6 million Remand Centre, which took 18 months to complete, will uphold the highest international standards.

This Centre is located closer to the Courts, which means that those with ongoing trials can be transported to their hearings more easily and securely than in the past.

Truly, this is a facility that we can all be proud about, because it represents a new standard for a new Fiji.

But it’s not cause for celebrations just yet. I have been informed that for the past six months, the number of remand inmates has hovered around the four hundred and thirty mark, which is double the capacity of this new facility.

While this new detention centre is a huge step in the right direction, it alone does not fix all the challenges we face in our Prison system.

Yes, it relieves some of the burden of overcrowding and allows for the separation of remand prisoners from convicted criminals, but there is more work yet to be done.

I am encouraged that there are now regular consultations between the Judiciary, the Fijian Police Force and the Fijian Corrections Service. This has resulted in a more efficient system that ensures remand cases can proceed speedily, and are not delayed unduly or unnecessarily.

Because we must never forget that we are dealing with people, many of whom will return to their families and communities. Our aim is not only to punish, but to help these people become responsible citizens for the betterment of Fiji.

One of the most important missions of the Corrections Service is rehabilitation – designed to increase the successful re-integration of inmates back into society. This includes hands-on training and work experience.

Recently, I was very happy to hear that the Corrections Service has been encouraging some of the inmates’ artistic talents, who are now achieving commercial success.

Fiji’s Yellow Ribbon program has drastically reduced the number of Fijians who return to prison after serving their first sentence. It’s all about giving people a second chance, and I’m very proud to say this program is producing results.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved in this project, including the Ministries of Social Welfare and Health for making this site available for development

I would also like to take a brief moment to acknowledge Fiji’s Corrections Officers. It’s all too easy to forget the difficult conditions in which our Staff operate and the challenges they face. The vast majority of Prison Officers do their jobs conscientiously and well and deserve the support of both the Government and the wider community.

With those few words, it is now my pleasure to officially open this new Remand and Detention facility.

Vinaka vakalevu.

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