

**Rear Admiral 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 RATU EMERI CATHOLIC SCHOOL’S PASS OUT PARADE**

**Ratu Emeri Catholic School Wed. 23rd April, 2014**

**Kubulau, BUA 1400 Hours**

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Bula vinaka and good afternoon to you all.

It’s a pleasure to be here with you at Ratu Emeri Catholic Primary School at the start of my tour of Bua.

It’s very important to me to travel around Fiji to meet with ordinary people in rural and maritime communities. We’re here to serve all Fijians, not just those who live in cities and big towns. Tours like this are the best way for me to hear your concerns and get feedback about my Government’s development programs.

But it’s a particular pleasure to be here today to witness the wonderful demonstration of drill just presented by Ratu Emeri School’s cadets.

Your display of timing and precision has been exemplary and no doubt your parents and guardians, teachers, friends and schoolmates will be very impressed with your performance.

Ratu Emeri is the first primary school on Vanua Levu to have a cadet program. You should be proud about the fact that you’re setting a very high standard for the rest of the island and for the country as a whole.

As your Prime Minister, I have always been a strong supporter of cadet programs in schools. Cadets are taught important values like teamwork and discipline, and military drill promotes fitness in students, setting them up for longer and healthier lives.

Most important of all, cadets learn the meaning and value of service. By service, I mean helping others and putting wider interests before your own. Being part of something larger than yourself.

It’s what we see in our Military personnel deployed on UN missions to countries around the world to protect vulnerable ordinary people. In Syria, in Sinai, in Iraq, in South Sudan, in Liberia and in the Solomon Islands.

It’s what we see in our civilian volunteers, including teachers and health workers, who are working with our neighbouring countries to boost their capacity and to improve the lives of their people.

And equally, it’s what we see in the thousands of Fijians whose work at home is helping to build a better, stronger, more modern country. Be it a civil servant working on one of Government’s development programs or a local business owner investing in our economy and creating jobs for our people.

I believe that it’s crucial that our young people learn the value of national service. That’s why it’s so gratifying to see it being taught here at Ratu Emeri Catholic School.

Without people who are willing to serve, a country has little hope for the future. You can’t achieve a vision simply by wishing for it.

We need talented and dedicated men and women to help turn ideas and policies into tangible results, who serve their fellow citizens with honesty, integrity and conviction. Individuals who are brave enough to rise above narrow interests and act for the benefit of all Fijians.

These will be the leaders of the new Fiji. Forces for good in our communities who seek to unite us, to combine our strengths, and to build something better for our children and our children’s children.

I have no doubt that some of you students here today will become such leaders.

I’m confident of this because as young people in Fiji, you have more opportunities now than ever before.

We are building a smarter country through our free primary and secondary schooling, plus the tertiary loans scheme to enable children from ordinary Fijian families to afford to go to technical colleges or universities. There is also our scholarship based on merit for the top 600 students for the selected courses.

These initiatives are the cornerstone of my Government’s long-term vision of building a clever country that offers more opportunities and is better able to compete in the ever-changing world.

Free education is not a handout. It’s the smartest investment we can make in the future of our nation.

The return on this national investment is simple: more and more young Fijians who are able to give back to Fiji while leading fulfilling lives.

More qualified young professionals who decide to work here rather than overseas. More talented young graduates who choose to boost the ranks of our public service with their energy and ideas. More young entrepreneurs who want to set up new businesses that create jobs. More young farmers, doctors, engineers, electricians, surveyors and scientists who will bring new techniques, skills and abilities to Fiji across a broad front.

My Government doesn’t just want our children to dream big, we want to give them the tools and support to turn these dreams into reality. Because if we’re able to do that, everyone wins.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to commend the management and staff of Ratu Emeri School for their early adoption of conversational Fiji Hindi and iTaukei as compulsory subjects for all students, as required by Fiji’s new Constitution.

And even before this, since 2012, I’m told that the school has sung the national anthem every day in all three major languages, with plans for Rotuman and Chinese versions in the pipeline.

This is a wonderful example for others and it’s even more impressive coming from one of Fiji’s rural schools.

Indeed, I have always been struck by the spirit of Fijians in the North and their willingness and eagerness to build bridges between different communities.

I congratulate the management, teachers and students on your achievement and give you my thanks and that of my Government for sharing our vision. I urge others to follow in your footsteps.

The bottom line is that there has never been a better time to be Fijian, to be a citizen of a nation that stands tall and proud in the world, offers more opportunities than ever before and has a wonderful future ahead of it. Provided we stay united, work together as a team and care for each other, we’re on track to great things.

Cadets, the successful completion of your training program is a significant achievement. This is a proud day for you, and a proud day for Ratu Emeri Primary School.

I congratulate you all for your engagement, commitment and effort and I hope that this experience inspires a sense of service in you for the future.

Congratulations as well to all those who have contributed to making this passing out parade ceremony a great success.

To those of you winning awards, you stand as strong examples to your peers, and especially to younger students who will follow in your footsteps.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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