

**Prime Minister and Chairman of the MSG, J.V.Bainimarama**

**Reciprocal Speech to Customary Welcome – Customary Senate, Noumea, Wednesday 19th June 2013**

President of the Customary Senate, Mr. Paul Wema

Distinguished Members of the Customary Senate

Leaders& Ministers

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ni Sa Bula Vinaka.

Bonjour.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your people for the opportunity to be here in your beautiful country and for the excellent arrangements in hosting the 19th MSG Leaders Summit.

May I accord my respects to the Customary Senate, its President Mr Paul Wema, Presidents of the Northern, Southern Provinces and Loyalty Islands and chiefs of the customary areas.

It is a both a privilege and honour for me personally and I speak on behalf of all the delegations here today, that you have allowed us to share in your distinct and special kanaky cultural heritage by according us this customary welcome.

This indicates to me that our rich Melanesian cultures and tradition has been sustained through generations and provides the cohesiveness that holds our peoples together.

You will note that the MSG has developed initiatives under the Treaty for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture to put in place measures that will protect and conserve our cultures and traditions; wether it be expressions through folklore, song and dance, knowledge, art, flora and fauna.

The onus is on us to ensure its sustainability and that future generations will be able to proclaim that they still have a distinct culture and traditions. The holding of Melanesian Arts Festivals and national initiatives to capture cultural information and tradition knowledge is acknowledged and is encouraged. We now have the technology to do this and must fully utilise this. May I emphasise here that Traditional Knowledge is intellectual property that one cannot learn at an institution of learning. My advice is therefore that elders impart this knowledge to your peoples and younger people to hear and keep it deep in your hearts.

On that note, I once again on behalf of the Leaders and MSG delegations express my deep appreciation for your kind gesture in according us your customary welcome and allowing us to be a part of you today.

May God Bless us All.

Vinaka Vakalevu

Merci Beaucorp