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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 HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON SOUTH-SOUTH CO-OPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Ritz Carlton Hotel July 18, 2013
HONG KONG 10.00AM**

Ambassador Francis Lorenzo, President of the IOSSC;
Your Excellency John Ashe, incoming President of the UN General Assembly;
Mr. Hamadoun Touré, Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union;
Honorable Ministers;
Your Excellencies;
Members of the United Nations and the Private Sector;
Distinguished Guests.

Bula vinaka and good morning to you.

When I was invited to address this distinguished forum, I was told that it would centre on investments in new innovative solutions for job creation and sustainable urbanization in the developing countries using the most advanced technology in the context of South-South Co-operation.

Today, I would like to speak to you not only about South-South Co-operation; certainly we are all committed to it, and it will define all of our discussions. I want to speak to you about people. In the final analysis, everything we do at this Conference, everything we discuss, every practical solution we develop is toward one goal—to benefit people. South-South Co-operation is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. And that end is the raising up of our people.

Our collective agenda must seek to tackle the causes of poverty, exclusion and inequality, so that neither income, nor gender, nor disability, nor geography will exclude anyone from the benefits of development. We need to connect people in rural and urban areas to the modern economy through quality infrastructure – electricity, irrigation, roads, ports and, of course, telecommunications.

Information technology—and by that I especially mean broadband technology—may represent the greatest promise we have to take a leap forward toward that goal. It can help us end the isolation that many of our people experience.

In the developing world, many people live in remoteness because of difficult terrain, poor infrastructure, and distance from urban centers. But others suffer from the same remoteness while living right in our midst—in urban slums and informal settlements that lack basic necessities.

South-South Co-operation cannot simply be a slogan, yielding more agreements among states and more calls for co-operation; it must produce an environment in which people of the developing world see possibilities, seize opportunities, and create new wealth.

South-South Co-operation cannot be an abstract concept for relations among governments; it must be an avenue for reaching all of our peoples; and for us as nations to share information on technological advances that promote success and stimulate growth.

Here perhaps is the most important point: there is a great deal of innovation coming today from the nations of the developing world. Many countries among us are actually quite advanced technologically, particularly in computers, information technology and telecommunications. We need to spread that innovation among ourselves.

The UN Secretary-General's report on science, technology and innovation called for establishing a globally effective mechanism to make the sharing and transfer of technology easier and more effective. The Group of 77 believes this mechanism should seriously address the technology needs of developing countries, including capacity building and the development, transfer and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies.

Improved technological capacity will make developing countries better economic partners not only for each other, but as partners for developed countries as well. It will spur stronger growth, build more capacity, and spawn more innovation.

By working together, we will produce greater equality within each country and help reduce inequality between the developed and developing worlds.

Distinguished Delegates and Guests,

We cannot wait. There are things we can do now, and we should do them—now. We can establish economic policies that make it easier for all people—regardless of their economic situation, regardless of the hurtles of geography—to have access to new technology that will change their lives.

We must invite the private sector to join us in engineering solutions to build our technological infrastructure. We must share our knowledge with our neighbours. And we must invest in education.

For us in Fiji, the decision was simple: We have committed ourselves to mobile technology as a means of truly uniting our country – of bridging the digital divide between urban and rural, rich and poor.

Our neighbours in the South Pacific confront many of the same challenges. We are a very tight-knit community, and Fiji has certain advantages that allow us to serve as a telecommunications hub in our part of the world. Those advantages include a strong infrastructure, major universities, a robust private sector, and well educated population. We are happy to share these advantages and the knowledge we have accumulated with our neighbours.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Fiji is a nation of some 900,000 people who live on 110 of our 330 islands. For us, connecting such a dispersed population is absolutely essential, and wireless technology has been our indispensable tool. Access to this technology empowers our people, improves education, provides better access to Government services, and helps us save lives during natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis.

We have extended mobile coverage – including 3G – to 95 per cent of Fiji. This has been a boon to Fijian business, and it has made Fiji attractive for foreign investors. We have adopted modern policies to encourage private investment and delivery of wireless service. We have also reduced our corporate tax to 20 per cent, which encourages all investment, including in telecommunications.

But we haven’t just given opportunities to businesses through incentives and lower taxes. We have opened the telecommunications market to real competition, which has made mobile connectivity affordable and, of course, increased penetration. We have also eliminated all duty on smartphones to make them more affordable for ordinary Fijians.

Next week, we will conduct Fiji’s first-ever auction of frequencies on the radio spectrum, beginning a process that will make 4G internet access available to all Fijians. The auction will encourage competition and attract foreign investment. The process is transparent, following global best practices.

Our approach has been holistic. Government alone cannot extend broadband access. It has to create the right conditions for the private sector. Then government can fill the gaps that the private sector cannot fill. As part of my Government’s Universal Access Program, network coverage – including 3G – will continue to expand to areas that currently have poor coverage or no coverage at all. Our goal is 100 per cent coverage. But we know that the private sector cannot do all of this profitably, so the Fijian Government will offer subsidies for service to remote areas, and we are financing the subsidy by placing a small levy on international incoming calls.

I am particularly proud of our initiative to improve access to the Internet for poorer Fijians living in remote areas. We have set up *“Telecentres”* in rural schools throughout Fiji, to give access not only to school children but to all those Fijians living in the surrounding communities, including many who have never had access to the Internet before. We expect to provide new Internet access to more than 60,000 Fijians – including 5,000 schoolchildren – by the end of this year.

In Fiji, as in many nations of the South, our population is quite young, so it is important to create as much growth and opportunity as possible right now. They are the generation that will seize the advantages we create today. And they are the generation for whom we must set the stage for tomorrow’s opportunities. Information technology is critical to meet this demographic challenge.

Distinguished Delegates and Guests, it is a myth that we must depend fully on the developed countries for technology. We have wisdom and experience to share. We know how to overcome challenges. We have the ability to help one another achieve our development goals.

In closing, I pledge that you can count on Fiji to do our part. My Government is proud to be immersed in this great effort to share wisdom and experience among developing nations.

We must act wisely and work together. If we do, technology will propel us into the future, bring greater prosperity to our nations and a higher standard of living for all of our peoples.

 Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you very much.

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