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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 THE SUVA MARKET SHELTER FOR RURAL VENDORS**

**Suva Market Wed. 30th April, 2014**

**SUVA 1100 Hours**

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**The Special Administrator, Suva City Council,**

**Management and Staff of the Council,**

**Suva Market Vendors,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula vinaka and good morning to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to be with you today to officially open the new Suva Market shelter, which will greatly improve conditions for vendors who travel to the capital every week to sell their produce.

I have always believed that one of my Government’s most important tasks is to enable ordinary Fijians to achieve their best in life. We don’t believe in handouts, we believe in creating an environment in which individuals can empower themselves through their own hard work and commitment to personal goals.

This means providing them with the skills, tools and resources they need to be a success – whether its tuition free primary and secondary school, access to university through Government loans, or better roads.

Upgrading Fiji’s local municipal markets is one of the most crucial actions we can take to unlock new opportunities for ordinary people.

Markets are the lifeblood of a community. They are a natural attraction to both locals and visitors for the wide selection of fresh produce, local crafts and other items they offer.

There is no better place for Fijians to sell the food they grow, the fish they catch, or the crafts they make.

The income earned at markets helps people support themselves and their families and is a crucial part of Fiji’s rural economy.

But as we all know, without the proper facilities, a market cannot grow to achieve its highest level of operation.

That’s why my Government has made a significant commitment in this year’s budget towards the development of local markets around the country, including those in Nadi, Sigatoka, Savusavu, Labasa and Nausori.

In fact, the Attorney-General was in the West two weeks ago to break ground for the Nadi market extension and which I expect to officially open in July.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel very strongly about this issue because most of the people who travel to sell their produce at market are women.

In Suva, some vendors will arrive the evening before market so that they are ready for an early start the next morning. But until recently, many women were forced to sleep on the street because there was no appropriate accommodation for them to stay in.

This wasn’t clean, it wasn’t safe, it wasn’t dignified and it wasn’t acceptable. Our ladies deserved better and in August last year the Minister for Social Welfare opened Suva’s first accommodation facility for female vendors.

This was a big step forward, but many vendors still had to face long days out in the open with no protection from the elements. If it rained, their produce would get wet and spoil, and customers would be driven indoors away from their stalls. The tarpaulins that some would use simply weren’t up to the job.

The new shelter will change all this, boosting sales and improving working conditions at the same time. The canopy gives protection from both sun and rain, keeps produce dry, and encourages foot-traffic in all weather conditions.

It’s the latest step in Government’s effort to give vendors what they need to have a comfortable environment to sell their goods and take full advantage of the opportunities the market offers.

At the end of the day, the 500,000 dollars Government has provided for this facility is a small price for something that will improve the lives of so many.

But I’m also excited about today’s opening for another reason.

The new market shelter is the latest chapter in Suva’s rebirth. With each passing month, we’re seeing new facilities and infrastructure appear that are transforming our capital city.

Piece by piece Suva is regaining its position as the pride of the Pacific - not just Fiji’s shining capital but the booming hub of the region.

Indeed, the development of Suva in the last few years has been remarkable.

When tourists used to visit us here, they saw a city that was past its prime. Run-down and not well maintained, which they took to be symbolic of our country as a whole.

Now when they visit, they see a city and a country on the rise, ready to grab its rightful place as the rising star of the region.

Amongst those who will be introduced to the new Suva are the passengers of the 60 cruise ships that are expected to come to port here this year, including the 14 that have already arrived.

This is very good news for Suva’s shops and restaurants because the money these tourists spend flows directly to them and into the Fijian economy.

The newly upgraded Suva Market can take advantage of this tourism boom as well, especially if we position it as a must-see stop on tours of the city.

Around the world, markets are leading tourist destinations because of the authentic experience they offer visitors and for the wide range of items on sale. There’s no reason this shouldn’t be the case in Suva.

Tourists can buy peanuts, pineapples, mandarins or whatever else to fuel them as they explore the rest of the city.

But tourists are also looking to buy authentic souvenirs to remember their time here. This is an opportunity for us to make sure that Government’s push to develop municipal markets ties in with another initiative of ours: the Fijian Made Campaign.

We want tourists to buy products that have been made in Fiji by Fijians, not knock-offs produced overseas. This is one of the reasons why my Government’s Fijian Made initiative is so important. The Fijian Made logos let visitors easily distinguish between what’s authentic and what’s not.

I would like to appeal to all Fijian craftsmen and vendors selling authentic goods to contact the Ministry of Industry and Trade to see how you can participate in this campaign, if you haven’t already. It’s a free initiative that will help you earn more money and will help our country as a whole by supporting local businesses, families and communities.

With those words, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to officially declare the new Suva Market shelter open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you

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