**HON PM BAINIMARAMA AT FIJI RUGBY UNION GOLD MEDAL VICTORY ANNIVERSARY**

**8/12/2017**

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

This is a wonderful occasion to relive our memories of the gold medal victory exactly one year ago. We all remember the joy and happiness that victory brought to our nation, and the pride we felt when our 7s heroes were crowned Olympic Champions. Their sacrifices, commitment, hard work, discipline and skill were rightfully rewarded, and it’s good to see members of the team here with us tonight to share in celebrating that magnificent moment.

I am sorry that Ben Ryan couldn’t be here, but I want to acknowledge his brilliant work and strong leadership, and thank him once again for the indispensable role he played in bringing home that famous victory. It only seems like yesterday, and I never get tired of reliving in my mind what was certainly the greatest night in Fijian rugby history. We should also remember and acknowledge our Fijianas, who represented Fiji so well in the Olympics, and although they didn’t medal in 2016, they did our country proud.
They played their hearts out and gave a fine accounting of themselves, and I know that someday soon we will be celebrating a women’s Olympic gold medal.

The array of trophies outside the room tonight makes for a dazzling display, and I am glad that we are finally displaying them properly. They show two things – Firstly, the deep heritage and history of Rugby in our nation, and the respect we have earned from many countries over many years. But these trophies are also like the pages of a history book: They show how successful our teams and players have been over decades. They show how much we have achieved in this sport as a nation. All anyone has to do is take a few minutes to study them, page by page. We know that history teaches us many lessons, and a people’s history gives them a sense of who they are and what they should aspire to be. This history teaches us that we Fijians can do anything. We can stand with people from any other nation. We can compete on any playing field, in any business endeavour, in any political arena.
Our rugby history tells us that we are a small nation that believes in its greatness, and that will help us continue to achieve great things.

But tonight, I want to mainly talk about Sevens Rugby. Our men’s Fiji team has been renowned as the one of the finest in the world for decades. We have a long history of success on the international stage. It is hard to count all the victories in all the tournaments over many years. We have won the Hong Kong Sevens 17 times since 1976, many more than our nearest rival, New Zealand, who have won it 11 times.

More recently, we have won the HSBC World Sevens series twice in the last 4 years. We have also won two Sevens World Cups, and we look forward to continuing that success in coming years. I remember well how the entire nation was transfixed during the Olympics, following every second of the tournament. Well, the whole nation is behind Gareth Baber and our boys for 2018, not only in the HSBC World Sevens series, but for the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane and the Rugby World Cup 7’s in San Francisco. And, it won’t be long before we will be defending our gold medal at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

In some countries, Sevens is a sport; in Fiji, it’s a way of life. And I wouldn’t have it any other way. In our towns, villages, settlements, and cities, in our schools, in our parks, on our beaches, Sevens rugby is simply part of the fabric of our society, part of who we are as a nation.

Our schoolboy rugby is the nursery that teaches our children the joy and benefits from physical activity. Running, passing, throwing, tackling and working together as a team – all attributes that help to build our youth into fine young men. We will see that tomorrow at the Coke Zero Deans Cup Finals. The young ruggers who play in tomorrow’s Deans Cup are players who will may very well represent our country in 7’s and XV’s over the next ten years. So tomorrow at ANZ Stadium, we will get more than a rugby tournament; we will get a glimpse into our future. And it will be a sight to behold, I am sure.

Some of these boys will end up playing in the many successful Sevens tournaments we hold in Fiji, the Coral Coast Sevens, the Marist Sevens, the Namaka Sevens, to name a few, and those tournaments form a wonderful pathway for our youth. Those Sevens tournaments—and all the others across our nation – develop and sustain our future Fijian National Sevens representatives.
Events like the Oceania Sevens are also important to our development. But there is one problem that we need to solve: Our country doesn’t currently have a major international Sevens event that places us properly on the world stage. And that has to change. We need a major Sevens event that befits our position as a dominant force in World Sevens rugby.

As you know, I never like to talk about problems without presenting solutions. And so tonight, as President of the Fiji Rugby Union, I am delighted to announce that the Fiji Rugby Union will be bidding for a Fijian leg of the HSBC World Sevens Series to be played here in our country.

When that bidding process commences—and that will be in the not-too-distant future – the FRU and Fiji will make a strong bid. We will pull out all the stops to win the right to host such an event. And when—not if—we win that right, we may be able to host as early as 2020.
And we are certainly ready to do so. We’ve shown we are more than capable of major international sporting events, and Fiji belongs on the HSBC circuit.

We want World Rugby to see the passion of our people, the support of our country and the unique Fijian way. We have the facilities, we have the hotels, we have the infrastructure, we have the air connections, we have the communications, and we are committed to using the next two years to make any infrastructure improvements that we need to make. Plus, we have done it before—with the Fiji International Golf Tournament, Crusaders vs. Chiefs games, and many regional athletic competitions. So we know that we can mount a credible, professional bid that meets all the needs of modern tournaments.

Why are we announcing this tonight? To send the message that Fiji will do what is necessary to present a compelling bid. We are asking the Fijian people to show their support.

We have the players. We have the will. We have a government that understands the benefits of showcasing our country to an international audience and attracting tourism and investment. We have a corporate sector that is marketing itself to a global audience. But most importantly, we have a people with passion for rugby and a real passion for Sevens.

Tonight, we are asking every Fijian to support FRU’s bid. We are launching Fijifor7s.com to allow everyone to show their support in the coming months. We want to show World Rugby the depth of our national commitment, the passion of our people and our capacity to deliver. I encourage all Fijians to register at Fijifor7s.com and help us bring the HSBC tournament to Fiji.

That is our task going forward. But tonight, let us also remember what happened in Rio. Let us recall where we were when we watched the seconds tick away in the gold-medal game. And most of all, let us remember that we need no longer dream of international sports glory, because we have already achieved it.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.