**HON PM BAINIMARAMA AT THE LAUNCH OF THE COCA-COLA AMATIL (FIJI) SOLAR ENERGY PROJECT AT LAUCALA BEACH IN NASINU**

**7/3/2017**

The Group Managing Director Coca- Cola Amatil Ltd

The General Manager - Coca-Cola Amatil Fiji
The Director of Sunergise,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have just come from the opening of an important Pacific event that is part of the climate action agenda of Fiji’s Presidency of COP23. And at that function at the GPH, I was able to stress the importance of why I am with you all today – to launch and commission Coca-Cola Amatil’s first solar powered plant in the Pacific.

I was able to provide a briefing on what you have done here in Suva to my fellow Pacific leaders, the Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific and the leaders of civil society and the private sector from throughout the region.

We are all meeting to discuss ways in which we in the Pacific can embark on some of our own solutions to the challenge the entire world faces from climate change. And in my opening address, I said that any project had to meet three basic tests:

First, any potential solutions we embrace must be transformative. They must be able to make a real difference and be game-changers.

Second, they must also be practical and affordable enough to be embraced on a greater scale. So that something that works in Fiji can also work across the Pacific.

And finally, they must be able to be replicated. Something innovative that happens in one community can also happen in communities across the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I was delighted to be able to tell everyone that this project by Coca-Cola Amatil – one of Fiji’s biggest companies - ticks all of these boxes. You have embraced solar energy to help power your installation here in Nasinu. And in doing this, you are taking a key leadership role in persuading private enterprise throughout the Pacific to do the same. Because we all know that embracing renewable energy is the key to solving the challenge of climate change, which poses such a danger to our way of life in the Pacific.

I salute the company for its vision on behalf of every Fijian and encourage every other Fijian business and investor to consider following your example. Because what you have done here is a practical and highly effective way in which the private sector can make its own contribution to the fight against climate change.

It really is a potential game changer; solar technology is becoming increasingly more efficient as well as affordable; and this is something that can be replicated throughout the region.

As I told my fellow Pacific leaders this morning, almost 4000 solar panels have been installed across almost 11-thousand square metres of roof space to generate 40 per cent of this site’s energy requirements. The plan is to take this to 80 per cent and extend the solar program to plants in Lautoka and Labasa. And already, the company is saving 415-thousand litres of diesel every year, along with 975 tonnes of carbon.

So this is a wonderful project and an example of how a multinational company – working with Sunergise and the Fijian Government – can make a real difference in the fight against climate change. Helping to protect our environment now and into the future.

Vinaka vakalevu Alison Watkin, Roger Hare, Ajay Raniga and the entire team at Coca- Cola and Sunergise for a great effort. As incoming President of COP23, I have been doing everything possible to encourage more private sector involvement in the climate change issue and I very much appreciate the lead you are taking.

I don’t need to tell you what is at stake here – the very survival of Pacific island nations. As I explained to my fellow leaders this morning, the latest scientific information we are getting is highly alarming. The impact of global warming is much more serious than we even appreciated when the nations of the world signed the Paris Agreement at the end of 2015.

This is not someone else’s problem. It is our problem. There are predictions that with the melting of the ice in polar regions, the sea could be as much as seven metres higher. Yes, seven metres. Which would put much of Suva under water, along with 80 per cent of the world’s capitals that are also coastal cities.

So the urgency of dealing with this cannot be overstated. I have to say I get a bit frustrated with some small minded people in Fiji who ask why I am spending so much time on COP when we have other issues to deal with in Fiji.

My simple response is that nothing else will matter in the least if we can’t secure our future in the face of climate change. It is the number one issue in Fiji and the entire world. And having been asked to lead that fight by the global community, I am going to do it and do it to the best of my ability. Because everything we hold dear as a nation depends on it. Our way of life, the future of our children, the future of our beloved Fiji.

So ladies and gentlemen, let’s all get behind this struggle. Keep cheap politics out of the need for urgent action on climate change. Let’s work together as a nation to do what we can to make a difference. To get the world to understand that our very future hangs in the balance.

Again, thank you Coca-Cola- Amatil for making a difference yourselves. And I encourage every Fijian company to embrace alternative energy in the same way.

I also want to acknowledge and thank you for your efforts to recycle some of the millions of plastic drink bottles that pose such a threat to our environment. Coca-Cola Amatil is the only local beverage maker engage in recycling PET bottles. And again, I urge other manufacturers to follow your lead.

And with those words, Ladies and Gentleman, I now have great pleasure in launching the Coca-Cola Amatil Fiji Solar Energy Project.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you.