**HON PM BAINIMARAMA AT THE POLICE MEDAL PARADE**

**8/11/2017**

The Commissioner of Police,

Senior Officers,
Retirees and Families,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here this morning as we recognise members of our Fiji Police Force who have exceeded the call of duty and showed their nation, and the Fijian people, an exemplary level of service.

We have recipients here today of the Fiji Police Medal, the Long Service Medal, Overseas Medal and the Solomon Islands Police Force International Law Enforcement Medal. And to all of our recipients, I would like to say, today is your day. Your day to be honoured and celebrated. Thank you, on behalf of a grateful nation, for your service to Fiji and for setting such a high bar for your fellow officers to meet.

I understand some of our recipients today are no longer serving as active members in the Force. I’d like to thank them for their service, and I’m very glad that we have this opportunity to pay tribute to the careers that they led as officers. Again, Vinaka Vakalevu.

Each of our recipients here today has done their part to strengthen the reputation of this institution, and care and protect those who were in need – both here in Fiji, and abroad as part of our peacekeeping operations. We can never fully repay the debt owed to each of you, but know that you have our deepest gratitude. Fiji is a safer place, Fiji is a better place, thanks to your service.

All of our officers, whether they are serving in Suva or the Sinai, are looked to as representations of our disciplined forces, and of Fiji. Your actions, your decisions and your conduct shape how our nation is seen around the world and determine the faith the Fijian people place in our officers to do the right thing and keep them safe.

Serving in our Police Force is not an easy job, nor is it meant to be. You are the wall that protects the vulnerable from those who would seek to prey on them. You are the answer to the call from those who are in distress. You maintain order and you uphold the law. And you do so as servants. Because you are servants to the public, just as I am as Prime Minister.

That duty of service extends to every Fijian. It extends to every corner of our islands and to every community in Fiji. I’ve been made aware that some officers have disregarded that duty, and failed Fijians who sought their help and who sought justice for crimes committed against them. I’ve been made aware that some Fijians have been treated as less than full citizens by our police – and I am here today to tell you that will not be tolerated.

I realise this is a day to celebrate the best of our police force, but this is an issue far too important to go unaddressed.

Every man, woman and child who calls Fiji home is a Fijian. And they are all entitled to every effort our police force can make to keep them safe. Fijians come from a wide range of backgrounds, religions, economic well-being and social status. Just because someone lives in a squatter area or is a labourer does not mean that his or her complaint is not as important as the rich person or well-connected or well-known person. It means that every single Fijian that makes a complaint or seeks your assistance must be treated with utmost professionalism, respect and compassion. Your level of professionalism should not depend on who is making a complaint. You must rid yourself of your personal prejudices and community prejudices and serve each and every Fijian equally.
You are here to protect them, you are here to seek justice for them and you are here to give them peace of mind so they can sleep at night, live their lives without fear and which will as a result give them the confidence to fully participate in and contribute fully to our nation. This in turn will also mean economic prosperity for all Fijians including you.

Increased professionalism will mean that the Fijian Police Force will be able to regain the respect and status it deserves. It will also regain the confidence of the public. However, if any instance is brought to my attention or the attention of the Commissioner of an officer dismissing any Fijian on the basis of ethnicity, religion or social or economic status, that officer will no longer be part of this force. It’s that simple. Our police force isn’t some community organisation, it is a national institution. And that means every Fijian should feel confident they can turn to our police when they feel endangered or in need.

That being said, I know the majority of our officers are doing good work for Fiji and for every Fijian. And their service is making a real difference for the safety and security of the Fijian people. And I’m proud that your work has led to a reduction in crime in Fiji by six per cent in the first six months of this year. That is commendable. But when it comes to the safety of our citizens, we can never sit back and be content. We can never settle for good work, we have to always strive to be greater.

We certainly can’t delude ourselves into thinking that more cannot be done. I’m deeply troubled, that while we’ve seen an overall drop in crime, we’ve also seen a 32 per cent increase in robberies, and that increase has been seen across all four divisions.

That isn’t acceptable. That doesn’t make anyone in Fiji feel like this is as safe place to call home. Criminals are stealing – and they are stealing more often – because they think they can get away with it. We have to make it very clear that they can’t.

It takes skill and expertise to do investigative work and narrow down a suspect. But we all know these crimes wouldn’t happen if there weren’t a market for stolen goods in Fiji. So we can’t stop at the individual, we have to take down the criminal networks that are trading in stolen goods.

We need to be proactive. We need to employ tactics that have been proven to work around the world. And we need to make clear to any bold enough to steal that they cannot escape the reach of the law, and that justice will be served.

We have through the 2017-2018 Budget given you all a pay rise. We will be giving you 200 more motor vehicles and 100 motorcycles. We have overall increased your budgetary allocation to give you access to greater communications technology and forensics to modernise the operations of the Fijian Police Force and give you the right tools to do your job better. We will also in the next 2 years conduct a review of your overall conditions including better access to quality housing.

Never before in the history of Fiji has there been such a huge injection of funds and resources directed to the Fijian Police Force in such a holistic manner and in such a short period. In return we simply ask you to conduct yourself professionally and take advantage of the resources and career opportunities through an open merit recruitment system.

I would like to leave you all with one final message this morning. And that is that as officers of the law, you must respect the rule law – more so than anyone. My Government has shown that we support our officers, but we’ve also shown that we demand they operate within the confines of the law. That expectation will continue, and all of our officers must be examples to our people by abiding by the law at all times.

Congratulations again to those who are being recognised this morning. Thank you to all of our officers for the brave work they carry out to make Fiji a safer place. And of course, thank you to the families of all of our officers for caring for them and for being brave for them as they put their own safety on the line for the sake of the Fijian people.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.