

**COMMODORE JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF(Mil), OStJ, MSD, jssc, psc**

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

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**SPEECH OF WELCOME FOR “ISLAND OF YASAWA-I-RARA” AIRBUS**

**Nadi Airport Wed. 6th Nov., 2013**

**NADI 1000 Hours**

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**The Attorney General and Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism;**

**The Chairman and the Board of Fiji Airways;**

**The Airline’s Managing Director and CEO;**

**The Staff of Fiji Airways;**

**The People of Yasawa-i-Rara;**

**Our National Treasure, Makareta Matamosi;**

**Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

This is the welcoming ceremony for the third and final of the Airbus A330s that will form the backbone of our rebranded national airline.

No-one will ever forget the wave of excitement that swept over the whole country when the first – “Island of Taveuni” - was delivered in March.

Or the pride we all felt when the second – “Island of Namuka-i-Lau”– arrived in May and we honoured the home island of our great designer, Makareta Matemosi.

Far from being the arrival of just another plane, today’s event is equally important, if not more so.

Because I am very proud to be here with the people of Yasawa-i-Rara to welcome the new aircraft that bears the name of their island home.

Less than a year ago, I led a mission to the Yasawas as we evaluated the damage caused to country by Hurricane “Evan”.

As you know, we were miraculously spared any loss of life, largely because of the work that had gone into our hurricane preparations.

But the sight that greeted us in Yasawa-i-Rara and like other parts in Fiji was, still heartbreaking.

Many houses were destroyed, others had lost their roofs and a great many others were badly damaged.

The Bukuna District School and the Yasawa Secondary School were also destroyed, along with the Methodist Church and the wharf.

But what Hurricane “Evan” hadn’t destroyed was the spirit of the people of Fiji including those in Yasawa-i-Rara.

And that spirit fortified and inspired me at a very challenging time for me as Prime Minister and for the rest of the Government.

Instead of despair, there were smiles. Instead of a defeatist attitude, there was a determination to rebuild.

It is, therefore, with much pleasure personally and I am sure I speak on behalf of all Fijians that we welcome the naming of our third airbus as “Yasawa-i-Rara” to symbolise the spirit we all aspire to - treating natural disasters as setbacks, not defeats.

Yasawa-i-Rara is no longer just a small and isolated place in Fiji. It is a name emblazoned on a state-of-the-art aircraft that will be seen by millions of people at the great airports of the Asia Pacific.

And over the coming years, it will fly millions of visitors to Fiji and bring millions of our fellow Fijians home.

This is the first time the Yasawas has been recognised in this way and I think it is long overdue.

Because we also want to commemorate the contribution of all the people of the Yasawa group of islands to our important industry and revenue earner – Tourism.

From the early days of tourism in Fiji, the Yasawas have been an important and attractive destination.

It’s not just the beauty of the islands themselves but the people of the Yasawas who make them special.

On behalf of every Fijian, I want to thank every Yasawan for your role in contributing to our economy, for opening your islands and your hearts to the world, for being so much a part of our new slogan – *“Fiji, where happiness finds you”.*

So welcome “Yasawa-i-Rara” from the Airbus factory in France. Welcome to your new home.

In closing, I would again like to thank the Chairman and Board of Fiji Airways for turning the airline around and making it profitable again. And to the committed staff who have embraced a new spirit in the airline and made the successful transition to Fiji Airways.

I especially want to take this opportunity to welcome the new Managing Director and CEO of Fiji Airways, Stefan Pichler, who comes to us with an impressive record of achievement in the airline industry.

Stefan, on behalf of the Fijian people, we’re pleased to have you at the controls.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the conclusion of this function, I’ll be going across the tarmac for the ground-breaking ceremony for the commencement of work to upgrade the Nadi International Airport.

As with our investment in these new planes and the new Fiji Airways, it’s all about investing in Fiji’s future, using our resources to modernise and keep pace with the rest of the world. To be proactive not reactive.

I’ll be saying a lot more about this when I announce the 2014 Budget on Friday. But it’s all about putting Fiji first and never being content with being second best.

We may be a relatively small economy in global terms, but we intend to grow. We may be a relatively small country but we have big plans for ourselves and our children.

Building on our achievements of the past few years, we have a vision of Fiji as encapsulated in our new Constitution - a Fiji which is a clever nation, a fairer nation, a nation in which every child has the same chance to get on in life, a nation standing proud and tall.

This is a great day to be a Fijian, but even better days lie ahead.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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