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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, i-Taukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

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SPEECH AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE 2013 ACP, STRATEGIC FRANEWORK, LOGO, CORPORATE UNIFORM AND THE BUSINESS RESUMPTION SITE

­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­ Holiday Inn Wed. 27th March, 2013

 SUVA 1000 Hours

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**Permanent Secretaries;**

**Heads of Financial Institutions – Asian Development Bank, Governor RBF, CEO/FNPF, CEO/ FRCA and CEO/FDB;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula vinaka and a good morning.

I am glad to be here today to officially launch the Ministry of Finance’s Strategic Framework for 2013-2014 and to usher in a number of changes in the Ministry.

These changes—the establishment of a new Business Resumption Site and the adoption of a new Ministry logo and new uniform —reflect and is symbolic of this Government’s professionalism and commitment to serve all Fijians.

My Government has set out not just to modernize our country, but to encourage in every way possible—in every Ministry—the highest level of professionalism, and to instil a strong ethic of serving the people.

We will always need to improve, become more efficient, find creative solutions to problems, and fight the temptation to rest on our laurels—to become complacent. With that little reminder, I congratulate the Ministry of Finance for working towards these objectives.

For the first time, this Ministry will have a two-year strategic roadmap. With the new Business Resumption Site, you have assured the people that there will be no serious disruption of service in the event of a disaster. The new logo and the new uniform reflect the pride you have in your work and in being a part of a Ministry that focuses on service.

The Ministry of Finance is one of the central agencies of Government. This launch today illustrates your commitment.

Last week, I began the consultation process for our new Constitution, which will produce a truly democratic parliamentary system. This is all about having a transparent, fair and reliable Government, one that cares for the people and is answerable to all Fijians. We are breaking apart the old top-down way of doing things.

What does this mean for the civil service, for many of you here in this room and others outside? It means that you will carry out the will of a legislative body elected directly by the people. You will be responsible to the elected government—as you are to this Government—to faithfully follow the policies it establishes and without regard to your own politics or philosophy.

This attitude of professional detachment from politics is critical to any quality Civil Service. You have your vote and you have your conscience. Your duty is to carry out the will of the people as determined by their representatives.

Some of you may be tested as we enter an electoral campaign. I urge and admonish you to maintain absolute neutrality in your work and to adhere strictly to the laws governing political activities of civil servants. Remember, you will work for all future governments. The people and their elected representatives must have faith in your professional integrity. Don’t ever risk losing their faith.

That integrity is critical to this Ministry’s mission of providing sound economic and financial policy advice to help the Fijian economy grow. A strong, growing economy creates more opportunities for our citizens and helps improve the quality of life for everyone. A strong economy means more jobs and more opportunities. It means better health, better education, better infrastructure, and better public facilities. And the Ministry’s Roadmap for accomplishing its mission over the next two years is the Ministry of Finance Strategic Framework 2013-2014 and the 2013 Annual Corporate Plan. Both are centred on the Ministry’s vision of *“prudent stewardship of Government’s finances”.*

Of course, you are a Finance Ministry, not just an accounting department for the Government.

And one of your most important responsibilities is to facilitate investment. I think we all agree that we can do more in this area.

We have put in place over the past few years a number of dynamic and non-conventional policies in place. These of course include but are not limited to significant reductions in corporate and personal income taxes, vat refund scheme, zero rating duty on a number of items and food voucher and bus fare subsidy programs.

But one of the most important achievements of our policy initiatives has been the fact that our policies have been driven by an adherence to key fundamental principles, which in turn has meant that we have had consistency. Consistency in policies and policy implementation coupled with transparency and fairness creates confidence. Confidence in turn ensures investment, spending and job creation.

Therefore, we as policy makers and the civil servants must facilitate, not impede.

We must continue to work on our procedures. It is this Ministry’s job to work with other Ministries to streamline process—improve systems, eliminate unnecessary obstacles, and treat all applications, all queries whether internal or external with urgency.

Upgrading and reforming our information technology (ITC) systems is another of my Government’s priorities. Both the “Fiji Services” portal and “Fiji Pay” are part of this priority.  Most Government services will soon be hosted on a single online platform. We will be able to give individuals and businesses easy access to a range of Government services and to make electronic transactions easier and cheaper for both businesses and consumers. These projects must harmonize and made uniform throughout the service. You all must facilitate to bring them in swiftly and accurately.

Today we launch the Ministry’s *“Business Resumption Site”* as part of our risk management strategy. The Ministry has established a secondary business operation centre to house backup systems and key documents in case of a disaster. We have to ensure that all of Government’s DRP (disaster recovery plans) are in sync and uniform in application to get a better return on our investment. This is why the ITC reform must be uniformly and expeditiously implemented.

And finally, today we unveil our new Ministry logo and uniform. It is important that our dress standards reflect the high level of professionalism that I referred to earlier, one that reassures our citizens that we are serious about our work.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to launch the Ministry of Finance’s:

* 2013-2014 Annual Corporate Plan;
* Official Logo;
* Corporate Uniform; and
* Business Resumption Site.

Vinaka Vakalevu.

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