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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, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

**SPEECH AT THE ST. PETER CHANNEL SCHOOL QUARTERS OPENING**

Korolevu Mon. 31st March, 2014

NADROGA 1100 Hours

Bula vinaka and good morning to you all.

It’s a pleasure to be with you today to celebrate the opening of new teachers’ quarters here at St Peter Channel Primary School.

Building a more modern Fiji requires big ideas and solid principles to guide us as a nation.

But my Government is not just about ideas and principles, its action driven and focused on delivering concrete results and services.

Each time we upgrade a new stretch of road, each time we connect a household to electricity or water for the first time, each time we build a hospital or health centre in a new area of the country, Fiji takes a collective step forward.

Each and every project forms part of the bigger picture of our national development and this includes the opening of these two new teachers’ quarters.

I am pleased that Government was able to provide the funding for this work totaling $125,000. I’m even more pleased that these facilities will improve the living conditions of the school’s teachers.

No job is more important, and no job is nobler than teaching. Teachers are not only educators, they are mentors. They play a critical role in molding our children into responsible adults and giving them the skills they need to succeed in life.

We all have a teacher or two that we remember for the lasting impact he or she has made on our lives, and I’m sure that the school children here at St Peter Channel’s will leave with the same impressions.

So, today I give the teachers here my sincere thanks and the thanks of my Government for their important work. Vinaka Vakalevu.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are 395 students on the school roll from ten villages and 5 settlements. Of these, I’m pleased to see that 209 are taking advantage of Government’s subsidised bus fares. I’m personally very proud of this initiative because it supports the education of our young people.

Education is the cornerstone of our nation’s future.  You’ll have heard me talking about Fiji becoming a clever country. It isn’t just an empty slogan. We must become smarter to be able to compete better in an ever-changing world.

Smarter Fijian workers will attract the investment we need to improve our living standards. Better educated Fijians will more easily get employment.

And I firmly believe that for Fiji to be a fair country in which all Fijians are equal, and a smart country, not one child can be left behind.

Under my Government, the right to an education and the ambition to pursue it is not something that depends on a family’s ability to pay tuition fees. Under my Government, education is becoming readily available to all Fijians, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances.

Without doubt, educating our young people is the best investment we can make in the future of our nation. I am proud that Government is now providing free tuition for primary and secondary school to all Fijians, fulfilling the promise made by our new Constitution. And because of this free education, this year we see more students enrolling in schools, even students who had dropped out are now returning to secondary school.

But we didn’t stop there. All Fijians, from all backgrounds, now have access to Government loans to make their dreams of higher education come true.

There are also our scholarships based on merit for the top 600 students for the selected courses that will propel our country forward. In addition, we are continuing our scholarships for civil servants to further their skills and knowledge, but now the selection is on a transparent basis.

All these initiatives are geared at giving, young Fijians the best possible opportunities to succeed in life and take the nation forward with them.

Now, Fijian students have more opportunities than ever before; opportunities their parents could only dream of. Today’s youth will be prepared for life in a way that few young Fijians have ever been before.

This will add to Government’s plan to build on the progress that we have made as a nation and the stability we have created to attract new investment to Fiji and provide new and sustainable jobs for our young people.

On a final note, a school is more than bricks and mortar. It is the combined hard work and dedication of the teachers, the parents, the community, and the students that truly make a school what it is. And that is why I believe this school has such a bright future.

With those words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have much pleasure in officially declaring the new teachers’ quarters open.

Vinaka Vakelevu. Thank you.

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