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**Commodore J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the Public Service, People’s Charter and Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

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ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE FRCA CUSTOMER SERVICES CENTRE,

SIGATOKA

Sigatoka  **Fri. 25th Jan., 2013**

**NADROGA 1500 Hours**

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**FRCA Board Members;**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Cola vina and a good afternoon to you.

This morning, I was in Rakiraki to open the Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority’s (FRCA) Customer Services Center there. I am happy this afternoon to be doing the same here in Sigatoka.

While the two areas differ in terms of economic development, they are both very important regions for our economy and they both have great potential for future growth.

Such occasions, therefore, give me much pleasure, as they demonstrate my Government’s commitment to encouraging this growth and to serving all Fijians equally.

We understand that – in the past – Government did not have much of a presence outside of big cities and towns. We understand that in order for us to fulfil our duty, we must bring our services to you.

This region is vital to the economic potential of Fiji. Not only is the Coral Coast the backbone of Fiji’s Tourism Industry, Sigatoka is also known as the Salad Bowl of Fiji.

It is - therefore - only proper that we have the Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority establish an office here. FRCA is one of the “tier-one” agencies whose approval is needed for new investments.

If we are to generate more economic growth, we need to offer these kind of services in areas such as Sigatoka.

Opening a FRCA office here will also provide general taxation and customs services to the people of Nadroga and Navosa.

You will not have to travel to Nadi, Lautoka or Suva for these services any longer.

And Ladies and Gentlemen, if we are to succeed in making government more effective, more responsive, and more capable every year, it is very important that you pay your taxes in full and on time.

Everyone who evades taxes denies you, your children and your fellow citizens of Government services you rely on.

People who don’t pay their taxes don’t take money away from Government, but from their fellow Fijians. It means less money for new schools, for new roads, for new hospitals.

If everyone in Fiji paid their taxes and complied with tax laws, we could easily have a surplus budget with prudent financial management. We could provide more services. We could do more as a nation.

For our part, we have lowered taxes and reduced duty rates on a number of key imports to make sure that our tax and revenue system is fair and affordable.

This year, we are going to further liberalise and simplify our tax system and continue our efforts. I believe that taxes should not be a burden or seem like a punishment. They should be a way for citizens to share in improving our country. They should be a way to help lift all Fijians. They should be a way to raise the standard of living, promote public safety, and provide the services that government is best placed to provide. That is my aim. And by reducing the burden of taxes and raising the value of what you receive for your taxes, I believe people will see paying their taxes as one of the many privileges of being a Fijian, and not just a civic duty.

If you’re not complying with the rules, you know who you are. And soon, FRCA will know who you are. Remember, if you hide - they will seek. So don’t sit on the sidelines. Take pride in doing your part for Fiji.

But ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to say that one of FRCA’s Gold Card members, Tappoos is from Sigatoka.

The Gold Card Premium Services - which I launched late last year - is a partnership between FRCA and certain Government agencies, offering red carpet services to compliant taxpayers. We want to thank those Fijians – including ordinary Fijians –

who pay their taxes on time and reward them for their commitment to nation building, including the projects we are supporting are right here in the Nadroga Province.

I encourage all of you, therefore, to make good use of the facilities now available to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have the pleasure of declaring the FRCA Sigatoka Customer Services Center open.

Vinaka vakalevu.

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