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

**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**

**REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE**

**BILATERAL MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA**

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono;

The Hon. Djoko Suyanto, Co-ordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs;

The Hon. Marty Natalegawa, Minister of Foreign Affairs;

Honourable Ministers and Members of His Excellency’s delegation;

Honourable Members of the Fijian Cabinet;

Senior Officials;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ni sa bula vinaka. Selamat Datang.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, to Fiji.

The relationship between our countries has always been friendly but that friendship has undoubtedly been strengthened since we established our Embassy in Jakarta three years ago.

It is a great honour and privilege for every Fijian that you have chosen to visit our country, especially given your busy schedule in the lead-up to the Indonesian election and your final days in office.

Your 10 years as President have seen some extraordinary achievements. We have been particularly impressed in Fiji with the way in which you have guided and strengthened your new democracy in Indonesia.

You have stood up to the forces of extremism and have upheld the notion of ethnic and religious understanding and harmony in a secular state.

All this is an inspiration to us in Fiji, as we embark on our own new democracy with our general election in September, one which creates a common and equal citizenry and provides for one person, one vote, one value.

We too have had our challenges in minimising ethnic and religious harmony. But we share the view that only by building bridges between communities and ensuring stability through a secular state can our nations prosper and reach their full potential.

Today’s meeting between us is not only a great honour and privilege for me personally but I hope it also sets the scene for a deeper relationship between Fiji and Indonesia across a broad front.

I believe that there are some exciting opportunities to expand our ties in the months and years ahead and look forward to developing that relationship in the interests of all our people.

I want to thank you for Indonesia’s assistance in setting up our Embassy in Jakarta in April 2011. As you know, I had the great pleasure to open our mission and become more acquainted with Indonesia during that visit. It was also a great pleasure to forge relationships with some of your senior officials, including your Foreign Minister, Dr Natalegawa. My own Foreign Minister and I very much appreciate the consideration and friendship that has always been shown to Fiji by the Indonesian Government.

Mr President, three years on, it is wonderful to be able to host you, your Foreign Minister, and your large delegation here in Fiji. We especially appreciate your presence as Chief Guest at the second Summit meeting of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF).

The PIDF is a unique forum that brings together governments, civil society organisations and the private sector to forge a strategy for sustainable development in the Pacific region. Many of the challenges we face are challenges you have also faced in Indonesia. So we look forward to hearing your insights when you address our Summit tomorrow.

This is also an occasion not only to reflect on what we have already achieved in our relationship, but to map out other possible areas of co-operation. In May 2011, our Foreign Ministers signed a Development Co-operation Agreement to guide our bilateral ties. We have made significant strides under that Agreement, especially at the government-to-government level over the past three years.

There have been several exchange visits at Ministerial and Official levels that have broadened our people-to-people contacts. Under your Government’s South-South Co-operation Program, you have provided Fiji with technical assistance and capacity building programs in agriculture, fisheries and forests.

These are not only deeply appreciated but have provided a tremendous boost to these sectors. Your assistance has improved the socio-economic position of a large number of our people in rural areas, especially women and young people. And for that, we are very grateful.

I also want to acknowledge the assistance the Indonesian Government has provided for our Rice Industry, including the provision of hand tractors for our farmers. All this has increased local production in agriculture and provided employment opportunities in rural areas.

Indonesia, of course, has had a Diplomatic Mission in Suva since 2002. And since then, we have seen an increase in the number of young Fijians taking part in your Darmasiswa Arts and Cultural Program.

We also appreciate the scholarships that your Ministry of Education has provided for young Fijians to undertake tertiary studies in Indonesia. We’ve seen a number of young Fijians over the years obtaining Masters Degrees in various fields. They have also returned to Fiji with the ability to speak Bahasa Indonesia. So not only are you building capacity for Fiji and strengthening our people-to-people ties, you have transported the great language and culture of your peoples to our corner of the Pacific.

These are truly the building blocks on which nations can create new relationships. Fijians are keen to learn more about the cultural traditions and unique diversity of your great nation. And I hope that while you are here, you and your delegation also see something of our own traditions and the cultural diversity of the Fijian people.

**(MOU)**

Your Excellency, we are about to witness the signing of Several Memorandums of Understanding. These come on top of a number of MOUs we concluded between 2011 and 2013. The MOUs that are to be concluded today include co-operation in the areas of diplomatic education and training, marine and fisheries, youth and sports, public works and infrastructure and visa exemption. I am advised that there are several other drafts in various stages of finalisation to cover other sectors.

All these MOUs, once implemented, should result in closer and more direct collaboration between the Ministries concerned and take our co-operation to another level. As Fiji sees it, these MOUs are living documents – not just pieces of paper – that signal our growing relationship at a government to government level and also the strengthening ties between our peoples.

With your concurrence Your Excellency, we would like to establish a Joint Commission between our senior officials which will include representatives from the respective ministries and agencies to monitor the implementation of the MOUs. This is to complement the current annual Policy Dialogue between our officials.

**(FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP)**

Our relationship at a government-to-government level for the past 40 years has laid the foundation not only to strengthen existing ties but establish new ones. We are especially keen to see partnerships develop in the private sector between Fijian and Indonesian businesses.

As a Government, we regard the expansion of trading opportunities as a major priority. We have a range of quality niche products and services under our Fijian Made umbrella. Some of these have already become global brands, some have the potential to achieve much greater market penetration.

On the other hand, Indonesia has a number of products and services available that can and should replace some of the existing source markets that Fijians import from. Apart from food products, we have recently seen for example fully made buses being imported from Indonesia. This has happened after we liberalized our trade rules.

So the potential for a greater trading relationship certainly exists and we would welcome the opportunity to explore those opportunities.

Your Excellency, may I now invite you to make your own remarks.

(President SBY makes his remarks)

PM: Thank you, Your Excellency, and for agreeing to the proposed Joint Commission.

**(BRIEFING ON FIJI’S ELECTION PREPARATIONS)**

Your Excellency, before we close, I would like to update you on the latest political developments in Fiji. Often the true situation here is distorted by the regional media (in particular from Australia and New Zealand). So this is a good opportunity to brief you face to face with facts.

Our preparations for our National Elections on 17 September are progressing smoothly and we are on target to deliver what we have always promised – a free and fair election under a new Constitution that provides every Fijian with the same opportunity, no matter who they are or where they come from.

I want to thank the Indonesian Government for its understanding of the challenges we have faced and the support and the technical assistance it has provided to Fiji for this historic event.

**(2013 Constitution)**

Our new Constitution – which was assented to by His Excellency our President last September – contains several unprecedented provisions to strengthen the rights of every Fijian. For the first time, it creates a common and equal citizenry, gives every citizen a common identity by declaring every person a Fijian and creates a level playing field in which all Fijians can prosper.

It abolishes privilege based on religion and ethnicity and abolishes the previous electoral system that was racially weighted. Under this Constitution, the vote of every citizen carries equal value, the cornerstone of democracies throughout the world. And for the first time, Fijians also enjoy a range of socio-economic rights – the right to economic participation, adequate health care, adequate food, clean water. Among other things, the protection of the environment is also guaranteed. We also have unprecedented recognition and protection for the indigenous or iTaukei Fijians regarding ownership of their land and customary practices.

This Constitution followed a period of national consultation in which we conducted 19 public meetings in urban, rural and maritime areas throughout Fiji, and received more than a thousand written submissions.

My Government is very proud of this document. Fiji finally has a Constitution that meets the standards of the world’s great democracies. And we are convinced that it is a blueprint with which to create our own new democracy and herald in a new era of justice, fairness and opportunity for all Fijians.

(**Preparations for the General Elections)**

Our preparations for the election are in full swing and we are confident that they will be conducted to the highest standards. Within the Elections Office, we have an international team of experts – Australians, New Zealanders and Europeans – assisting a large Fijian staff with their preparations.

We intend, for the first time, to hold our election in one day instead of the week-long process of previous polls in Fiji. Some people have said it can’t be done, given the way in which our voters are spread over scores of islands. But we have said that if Indonesia can do it in one day, so can Fiji.

We deeply appreciate your offer of assistance to monitor the election process. Indonesia will be one of the co-leaders in the multi-national observer team – Indonesia's presence gives us great confidence in the integrity of the observer group. We are determined that this election will be free and fair and reflect the genuine will of the Fijian people.

(**The Voter Registration Process**)

Every Fijian over the age of 18 is entitled to vote – another first in Fiji - where the voting age has traditionally been 21. To ensure the integrity of the voter registration process, a reputable Canadian company was selected to conduct Electronic Voter Registration (EVR). Every voter has been given a Voter Registration Card which they will need to produce on election day to verify their identity and prevent the fraud that has marred previous polls.

Todate, more than 554-thousand Fijians, or over 90 percent of all eligible voters have registered to vote. We sent teams from the Elections Office to major parts of the world where expatriate Fijians are known to be living. As long as they have a valid Fijian passport, they are entitled to be registered and entitled to vote in the General Election.

Voter registration closes on 4 August and on 25 August, national candidate list will be released.

A comprehensive voter education program began this week to explain the mechanics of the process.

There will be one national constituency and 50 seats in the new Parliament. Broadly speaking under the system we have adopted – the same in many other countries – the more votes a party gets, the higher percentage of seats it gets in our new Parliament.

(**Electoral Commission**)

The conduct of the election is entirely independent. We have an independent Electoral Commission made up of Fijian citizens to oversee the process. And the actual conduct of the election is in the hands of an independent Supervisor of Elections, who is supported by a multi-national team.

(**Registered Political Parties**)

Five political parties have been registered to contest the General Election, after a process which required them to obtain the signatures of five thousand citizens to meet the registration criteria.

I am leading one of them – *FijiFirst –* and the others are the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), the National Federation Party, the People’s Democratic Party and the Fiji Labour Party.

So Your Excellency, the stage is set for a genuine contest in which the Fijian people are the ultimate arbiters.

(PM invites HE SBY to respond if the latter wishes)

(HE SBY responds)

(PM closes)

**CLOSING REMARKS**

As we wrap up Your Excellency, I want to acknowledge the very substantial donation Indonesia has made to the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) to establish a Regional Police Academy in Fiji. Few things are more important than the security and safety of our citizens. And with this donation, Indonesia has given the nations of the MSG the capacity to significantly improve the quality of our policing.

Fiji obviously regards the MSG as a central platform of our foreign policy. Indeed, we are working towards a common market between the MSG countries, involving the free flow of goods, services and labour.

We deeply appreciate Indonesia’s engagement with the MSG and your bilateral and regional assistance. We also want to facilitate closer collaboration with our Melanesian brothers and sisters in eastern Indonesia, including Papua and West Papua.

Your Excellency, with those words, may I again welcome you, the First Lady and Members of your Delegation to Fiji. This is a historic occasion – the first visit of an Indonesian President to our country - and we are deeply honoured by your presence.

As you prepare to stand down after your decade in office, I would like to pay a personal tribute to your years of service to the Indonesian people and the world at large and wish you and the First Lady every happiness in the years to come.

Vinaka Vakalevu, Terima Kasih, for being an understanding friend and development partner and we look forward to even closer ties with your great nation in the months and years ahead.

My I now invite Your Excellency to the stage to witness the signing of our

MOUs.

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(PM escorts HE SBY to the Signing Room)