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**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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**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF DRAIBA PRIMARY SCHOOL NEW SCHOOL BUILDING**

Draiba Primary School Tues. 18th Feb., 2014

Ratu Sukuna Road, NASESE 1000 Hours

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**The Head Teacher, Management and Staff of the Draiba Primary School,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Parents and former students,**

**Boys and Girls.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be back here at the Draiba School, which has served the residents of this part of Suva – Draiba, Nasova and Nasese – since 1947 and has produced some of Fiji’s finest leaders.

For any school in Fiji to have served the needs of our people for 67 years is something worth celebrating. But Draiba has a special history that has included both good times and bad.

In the days when schools were established on the basis of ethnicity, It was the first indigenous Fijian primary school in our capital city.

After a hurricane in 1952 destroyed the existing structures where the children held their lessons, the Government built a new school, which opened the following year.

Since then, tens of thousands of young Fijians have passed through the school, gaining the knowledge they need to benefit their own lives and contribute to the life of our nation. But there have also been dark periods in the school’s history that must never be forgotten or repeated.

During the rebellion of 2000, those who seized the Parliament and held our representatives hostage for 56 days also turned their attention on Draiba School. One of the four classrooms was torn down and used as firewood to cater for the needs of the mob camped up at the parliamentary complex.

This disgraceful act – tearing down a school classroom and burning it – sums up for me the madness of the events of 2000 and why Fiji was extremely fortunate that the rebellion was put down. I ask you: how does destroying a place where Fijian children are educated help the Fijian cause? It doesn’t. And unfortunately, some of these people who supported the 2000 rebellion are still with us fourteen years on asking you to support them in the coming election.

Since the revolution we launched in 2006, my Government has placed education at the forefront of our national life because it is the best way – the only way – to improve the position of ordinary Fijians.

You boys and girls here at Draiba and those throughout Fiji are our future. It is on you that the future of our nation depends. If we can make you smarter by giving you a better education, we can make our country smarter. It means that the things we make as Fijians and the services we provide will be the best that they can possibly be. We can perform better economically, compete more effectively against other countries and earn the money we need as individuals and as a nation to give ourselves a better standard of living.

I know what it’s like to sit where you are now because I did so myself. I attended this school as a boy in the 1960s. Like you, I was fortunate to have teachers who took pride in their vocations, took pride in the school and cared about my welfare and that of every child at Draiba. But there are things that you have now that we didn’t have and, indeed back then, the world had never even dreamed of having.

I’m delighted that Draiba has been chosen as one of the pilot schools in the Government’s One Laptop Per Child program. Being able to use a computer – being computer literate – is one of the biggest leg-ups you can get as a student. It opens up a whole new world of possibilities to you. And if you can get on the Internet even better, because that is the key to the world of knowledge and learning that comes with having access to the World Wide Web.

We currently have 20 Government Telecentres all over Fiji opening up this world to ordinary people, empowering them and expanding their horizons.

Nothing has been more satisfying to me – nothing has made me feel more proud – than to have led a government that has been able to provide free primary and secondary school education for the first time.

And it makes me extremely happy to think that even the poorest child in Fiji is no longer being left behind. That even the poorest child is benefiting from the leg-up we have given every young Fijian to get ahead and fulfill their dreams. My message to all of you today is simple: seize the opportunity that you have been given and run with it as fast as you can. Because together, we can make Fiji great.

I want to ask you children today – and every child around Fiji - to do something very important for me and the country. As some of you will know, those pesky mosquitoes are carrying a disease called dengue fever. It is making a lot of people very sick and some have even died. Our Health Ministry tells us that there are 1,859 confirmed cases but we think the actual number may be 4,500 because many people don’t go to the doctors.

These mosquitoes breed in still water. That water can be in a bucket, a plastic container, or anything that can hold water for any length of time. We have to hunt down anything with water in it where these mosquitoes can breed.

You might have seen the new ad on TV telling everyone about this disease and what to do. You need to put on some kind of mosquito repellent so the mozzies don’t bite you when you go out. Ask your parents to get you some if you don’t already have it. Sleep under a mosquito net if you can. Get your parents or an older brother or sister to light a coil.  But I also want you to join in the hunt for those places where the mozzies are breeding and hiding. Go into your own backyard and make sure there’s no water in anything. Get together with your friends and track down these places where the mosquitoes are coming from, carrying this terrible sickness. Clean up around the house. Remove containers or rubbish that hold water.  Empty your pot plant trays, empty the water out of old tyres, household rubbish or tarpaulins. Make sure your parents keep the gutters clear and the grass cut.

The whole country needs to get together to fight Dengue Fever before this outbreak gets worse.

With those words, I just want to say again how pleased I am to be back at my old school and wish everyone an unforgettable day. And I have equally great pleasure in declaring this new facility open.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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