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REAR ADMIRAL (RET.) JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF (Mil), OStJ, MSD, jssc, psc

**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Provincial Development, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources**

**SPEECH AT THE NATABUA HIGH SCHOOL CADET PARADE 2014**

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Natabua High School Fri. 8th August, 2014

LAUTOKA 0900 Hours

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**The Principal and staff of the Natabua High School;**

**Parents and Invited Guests;**

**Cadets and fellow Students;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning to review the passing out parade of your cadet corps.

Cadets, let me begin by congratulating you on your parade. Your turnout, drill and bearing were of the highest standard. You, your families and your instructors should be very proud about the precision and discipline of your performance. Well done.

You are part of a long tradition that spans back to 1952 – the longest history of cadet passing out in Fiji. You join the ranks of more than 12,000 cadets who have gone before you over the past 62 years. They’ve created a very strong legacy here at the school that you are now a part of. However, you enjoy the distinction of being the largest cadet class ever at Natabua, standing at 1,102. I have to say, you make a very impressive sight.

Your cadet corps is part of the long military tradition in Fiji that is at the centre of our national life. It has seen us serve with distinction in successive conflicts – the First World War, the Second World War and Malaya.

In more recent times, our job has been to keep the peace. For more than three decades, we have provided troops to the international community through the United Nations for its peacekeeping operations in various parts of the world. Our task is the most noble of all for any soldier – to try to prevent war, to put ourselves between the warring factions to keep the peace, to protect vulnerable ordinary people. To keep them safe.

Today, I ask that we all take a moment to think of our brave men and women in uniform who are serving overseas and pray for their continuing safety. Let us keep them always in our hearts and minds.

If you happen to see a member of the armed forces, I urge you to go up to them, shake their hand and thank them for their service. They are a great credit to themselves and to our nation. They are doing us proud – in the Golan Heights, Sinai, Iraq, Sudan. There are currently more than one thousand of them overseas. Serving Fiji. Serving the world.

Some of you cadets here today will follow their example and go on to serve in the armed forces. Others might follow paths into agriculture, commerce, medicine, law, teaching or theology. No matter what you choose to do, remember that there are many ways to serve your country. Every Fijian has the ability to give back and make Fiji a better place.

Looking out across this parade today, I feel a great sense of inspiration and optimism about our nation. By joining the cadets, you have embraced the notion of patriotism – love for your country – of discipline, duty, honour, integrity, honesty and the wonderful principle of service that we must always place at the centre of our national life.

You have also been taught about the value and importance leadership and it is on this topic that I would like to say a few words today.

There are many different qualities that go into making a good leader – wisdom, honesty, commitment, vision – but I believe that the essence of good leadership is leading by example. To stand up for the things you believe in and speak out when you see your values being challenged.

 I’m sad to say that we are currently witnessing a noticeable lack of leadership amongst many leaders in our society. Earlier this week, one of Fiji’s main political parties came out and said that it believes that some Fijians are above others – that we can never all be equal. This is a remarkably divisive statement that stinks of the politics of the past. Any person who truly holds democratic and liberal values would be quick to disassociate themselves from such poisonous words.

Yet, these comments have been met with a remarkable amount of wavering and weakness. Too few have had the courage to stand up for their values and strongly reject this attack against the basic notion of equality and justice for all. Where are those who claim to support a common and equal citizenry? Where are Fiji’s very vocal NGOs? Where are the human rights organisations now? It seems like they are willing to sacrifice values that many of their members hold dear simply to stand in opposition to my Government and its reforms. This isn’t leadership. This is cowardice and political calculation at its worst.

Well, unlike them, I am proud to say that the Fijian Constitution declares everyone a Fijian, giving us all a common name and a common identity for the first time, strengthening our sense of unity and belonging, while recognizing the special place of the indigenous peoples of Fiji.

I am proud to say to all of you here today that as far as I am concerned, no one is an outsider in the new Fiji. We all belong. We are all Fijian. I am the Prime Minister for all.

I am asking for your support to keep our country unified, to turn your backs on the politics of the past and embrace the bright future that lies ahead if we can stay unified and focused. If we can work together – hand in hand – to make Fiji great.

Cadets, you have made me very proud today. You have made your RFMF instructors proud. You have made your parents and teachers proud. You are a great credit to your school and a great credit to our nation.

 Over the past 13 weeks, you have learned about yourselves, about your strengths and weaknesses, and about important values like discipline, honour and honesty. Take these lessons with you as you embark on the next chapter of your life, they will serve you and our nation well.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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