

**COMMODORE 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

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**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE POPPY APPEAL 2013**

Ratu Sukuna Park Fri. 11th Oct., 2013

SUVA 1400 Hours

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***The President and Executives of Returned Soldiers and the***

***Ex-Servicemen’s Association;***

***Distinguished Guests;***

***Ladies and Gentlemen.***

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

It’s a great pleasure to officiate at today’s launch of the 2013 Poppy Appeal, which always has a special meaning for me as both your Prime Minister and Commander of the RFMF.

It’s now 95 years since the end of the First World War, when the poppy legend was born in the battlefields of Belgium as a symbol of remembrance for the millions who died in what was meant to be the war to end all wars.

Sadly, those hopes were never realised. But this little red flower – which sprouted from the unmarked graves of the fallen soldiers – has become a treasured symbol of remembrance for the dead in all wars.

We all wear it with pride as we remember the ultimate sacrifice that our servicemen have made over the years in the defence of our values and our way of life. It’s to them, of course, that we owe the peace and freedom that we enjoy today. And we must never forget that sacrifice.

As you all know, this appeal will run until November the 11th, when we formally celebrate Remembrance Day on the *“eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month”*. I urge every Fijian to buy a poppy and wear it with pride as we join this global commemoration.

Specifically here in Fiji, we again remember our own sons and daughters who served in the two world wars, in Malaya, and in our successive UN peacekeeping missions over the past three decades.

We’re all extremely proud of our Fijian servicemen and women for their dedication and bravery and the honour they have bestowed on Fiji.

To all servicemen and women present here today – both current and former – the nation salutes you. You have our enduring respect and grateful thanks.

To the family members of those who have died on active service, can I say on behalf of every Fijian: No words can ever adequately express the extent of your personal loss. But rest assured that the sacrifice of your loved one will never be forgotten. That is our solemn promise to you here today.

We also renew our undertaking that Fiji will always be there to defend the cause of freedom, wherever that may be. As I speak to you today, hundreds of our servicemen and women are putting their lives at risk in the most noble of causes – not waging war but keeping the peace for ordinary people in troubled parts of the world.

Last night, His Excellency the President spoke for the entire nation when he said that they are in our thoughts and prayers and we especially pray for their safe return. He also reminded us of the sacrifice being borne by their families – those who remain behind. They too are in our thoughts and prayers today.

My fellow Fijians, when you buy a poppy, you are buying a piece of history and a symbol of the sacrifices made by others to guarantee the life you have today. I call upon you all to support this appeal and whatever your age, to wear the poppy with pride.

Every contribution goes towards the Ex-Servicemen’s Association, an organization run by, and for, our former servicemen and women. They need our support and our care. And while the Government is playing its part, this is an opportunity for every Fijian – whatever your age - to contribute.

I look forward to seeing you all on Remembrance Day itself.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you.