

**COMMODORE JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF(Mil),OStJ,MSD, jssc, psc**

SPEECH AT THE SOLOMON ISLANDS 35TH NATIONAL DAY

CELEBRATIONS

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Honiara Mon. 8th July, 2013

SOLOMON ISLANDS 1100 Hours

Your Excellency the Governor General of Solomon Islands, Sir

Frank Kabui;

The Honourable Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Darcy Lilo;

Honourable Ministers;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished Guests;

My Dear Melanesian Brothers and Sisters – Citizens of Solomon Islands.

*Halo Oloketa* and a very good morning to you all. I also say *“bula vinaka”* from the Government and people of Fiji. They send their congratulations and warmest regards as we all celebrate the 35th anniversary of your Independence.

I bring you special greetings from the *“Kai Solomoni”* in Fiji, those who left your shores to live among us as Fijians.

Nothing can break the bonds between our two countries. We are all proud Melanesians, part of the brotherhood that also links us with the people of Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Kanak people of New Caledonia.

Prime Minister, I am deeply honoured by your invitation to be here today as Chief Guest to commemorate this wonderful occasion. And all Fijians are honoured that you have invited so many of us to come to Honiara, including a large detachment of our military and police.

Some 200 people have come from Fiji for this event, to join the large number of Fijians already here.

What we are celebrating today is more than just another anniversary. It is a celebration of the way in which Solomon Islands has faced up to its many challenges, survived as a unified nation, and has set its eyes on the future. A nation determined to improve the lives of its citizens and take its rightful place in the region and the world.

We look back at some very difficult times – the tragedy of a nation divided by civil war and the resulting loss of life, the many challenges of restoring peace with the assistance of your neighbours, the renewal of stability and the continuing effort to rebuild your institutions and your economy.

But we also look forward to better times, as Solomon Islands joins hands with its Melanesian neighbours to forge ahead - to give renewed hope to all our people that the dreams we all shared at Independence are finally realised.

The lesson for us all is that only through unity and a common sense of purpose can we fulfill that promise. It means putting hatred and prejudice aside, putting sectional and ethic interests aside, assisting the weak and the marginalised, building a sense of national purpose and working together as One Nation.

The Solomons is not alone. In Fiji, we have also struggled with the same challenges - individuals putting themselves and their narrow interests before the national interest, selfishness, corruption, prejudice, discrimination.

It has taken us many years to smash the barriers between us, to think of ourselves not as members of individual ethnicities or communal groups but as Fijians, with common aspirations and a common future.

We are now building a new and better Fiji in which everyone is equal and everyone has the same chance. And next year, we will have the first genuine democratic parliamentary election in our nation’s history of equal votes of equal value.

Equally, we are now working with our Melanesian partners – including Solomon Islands - to build a new and better region in the South West Pacific, a stronger region with more economic clout and a louder voice in global affairs.

Both our countries treasure our membership of the Melanesian Spearhead Group. Because we know that the principle of strength through unity doesn’t just apply in our individual countries. United, the people of Melanesia can also be a bigger force in the region and the world at large.

We have a dream – a bold vision that we believe is achievable. We’ve already smashed many of the barriers in the way of the free movement of trade and people between our countries. But we’re now working towards something more ambitious - a common market between the MSG countries for the free flow of goods, services and labour.

We also want to secure trade agreements with the rest of the world as a bloc, not as individual countries. And we want the Melanesian viewpoint to be taken much more seriously at the United Nations and in other global forums.

This especially applies to the things that are most dear to us all – the impact of climate change, fishing rights, the protection of our natural resources, the defence of our borders and the preservation our unique Melanesian cultures and way of life.

Solomon Islands is an integral part of this plan, which is designed to benefit every Melanesian. And I want to pay tribute today to Solomon leaders, past and present, not only for their leadership of their own country but their contribution to our common regional cause.

I especially value the friendship and counsel of the current Prime Minister, who I thank today for his vision and leadership.

For Fiji’s part, we have a strong record of engagement in Solomon Islands.

Fijian troops spilt their blood here resisting the Japanese advance in World War Two.

Fifty (50) Fijian troops died during the Solomons campaign and we remember their sacrifice with gratitude.

Seventy years on, I am especially proud that three Fijian veterans of that campaign are present with us here today -Sergeant Major Eliki Vuniwawa, Lance Corporal Ilimotama Wave and Commando Watisoni Seru.

Please acknowledge their wonderful service to both our nations. (pause for applause)

Fijian troops have also served in Solomon Islands in recent times in the cause of peace as member of RAMSI – the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon.

And we also have Fijian civilians present at many levels to assist your efforts at nation building.

I want to say here today that Fiji stands willing and ready to take that assistance to another level with more personnel and resources, if that is the wish of the Government and people of Solomon Islands.

Thank you again for bestowing me with the honour of being here today. During my visit, I have unveiled a plaque (am unveiling a plaque ) that reads: “From the Government and people of Fiji to the Government and people of Solomon islands on the 35th anniversary of your independence. In solidarity and friendship”.

That plaque will still be here long after we have all passed into history. But it will be a permanent reminder that Fijians have, and always will, extend the hand of solidarity and friendship to Solomon Islanders.

On this day, above all, may God Bless Solomon Islands and all its people.

I wish you all the very best (Mi hamamasim yu pla olgeta).

Taggio tumas, Vinaka Vakalevu.

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