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**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**

**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE VEIVUETI TAXIS CO-OP BASE**

**1 River Road Tues. 12th Nov.,2013**

**NAUSORI 1100 Hours**

Government Officials from the Various Ministries;

Representatives of the Vanua;

Representatives of the Private Sector and Business Houses;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

Precisely a year ago today, I was in Nausori to launch the first of the Government Service Centres, that have brought Government direct to the people.

And twelve months on, I’m delighted to be back with you in the “river town” this morning to launch the Veivueti Taxi Co-op.

This occasion is significant for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it’s a great example of ordinary Fijians coming together to help themselves and each other.

You haven’t waited for Government or someone else to suggest an idea or come up with a plan. You’ve done it yourselves.

And you can be satisfied and proud that the initiative you’ve shown is bound to be a model for others.

Secondly, you have demonstrated to every Fijian the power of the principle of strength in unity.

As taxi drivers, you are bound to be a lot stronger economically working together in your co-op than you would be working on your own.

This happens to be the principle we have adopted for the entire nation – that Fiji can only ever be great if we are united; one nation in which no-one is left behind and every Fijian has the same opportunity to get on in life.

Indeed, Fiji as one big co-op – Government, business, workers, everyone in a grand partnership to take our beloved Fiji forward.

That spirit of unity is what we are seeing in Nausori today, which is why I am proud to launch the Veivueti Taxi Co-op.

This Co-op is a venture of different individuals coming together.

From now on, the travelling public has one number to call to access 48 taxis and one minibus in the wider Nausori area.

I’m told that there are another 60 operators who’ve lodged applications to join the Co-op so already its benefits are being appreciated.

Together, you are bound to capitalise on the expanding economic opportunities that my Government envisages for the town of Nausori and the surrounding provinces of Tailevu and Rewa.

To achieve that growth, we are putting in place a range of measures that, together, are guaranteed to improve the lives of the people of this region.

Undoubtedly the most important for any taxi driver is that we are fixing the roads. This will benefit all of you as this work progresses because there will be less wear and tear on your vehicles.

But better roads also mean a better economy generally, as ordinary Fijians get quicker access to markets to sell their produce and can travel further in less time to do so.

In Nausori, we are also improving facilities at the market, which will benefit everyone – sellers and buyers. And we have brought Government services closer to the people with the new Government Service Centre I opened a year ago. I’m sure this has also been good business for taxi drivers.

And then, of course, there are the things we are doing for the whole country to improve the lives of every Fijian, which is my Government’s Number One priority.

In the Budget on Friday, I announced perhaps the most important reform any government in Fiji has ever taken – free education in our primary and secondary schools and a loans scheme for tertiary students.

This has never been done and I am very proud that we have been able to achieve it.

Because it doesn’t just mean that the Mums and Dads of Fiji no longer have to worry about how they are going to pay their children’s school fees.

By bringing education to everyone, even the poorest Fijian family, we are bound to become much richer as a country – smarter and more able to seize whatever opportunities that arise in the future.

I urge all of you to take advantage of this education revolution. There is now no reason or excuse for any Fijian child to be left behind. We intend to take the country forward – together – and fulfil the destiny we all dream of for ourselves and each other.

In conclusion, I want to urge all of you to take advantage of your new co-op but also use it to serve the people better.

Taxi drivers are service providers. Yes, they are in the business to make a living. But they are also there to serve. Your passengers are your customers. Treat them well. Don’t rip them off.

Thank you, executives and members, for the invitation to be with you today. I wish you every success and have great pleasure in launching the Veivueti Taxi Co-operative.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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