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**Rear Admiral J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil),OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc**

**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**

**OPENING ADDRESS AT THE PM’S GREEN GROWTH FRAMEWORK SUMMIT**

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Novotel Convention Centre Thurs. 12th June, 2014

LAMI 0900 Hours

**Cabinet Ministers;**

**Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**

**Representatives of our Development Partners, the Private Sector, and Civil Society;**

**Invited Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

It’s great to be back from my overseas trip and to be with you all today for this important gathering – a national summit to consider a Green Growth framework for Fiji’s development.

I want to thank you all for taking the time to be here because let there be no doubt about the significance of this event.

The old ways of growing our economy, of developing our nation, are no longer adequate or acceptable. Too much of what has been done has been unsustainable. In far too many instances, our resources have been exploited without the proper care that is needed to nurture them so that they continue to provide the prosperity on which we all depend.

Your task over the next day and a half is to consider new ways in which those resources can be protected and sustained. We need to reshape our development strategies away from the conventional growth model of exploiting particular resources for our own use in the here and now. We need to refine our existing approaches and forge a new development model - one that is more holistic, integrated, inclusive and above all sustainable.

The term *“Green Growth”* has been adopted globally to describe a path of economic growth which uses natural resources in a sustainable manner. But it has particular resonance in the Asia Pacific, where we all know that far too often, development has come at the cost of our environment. In our clamour to grow our economies and raise the living standards of our people, we have far too often sacrificed our precious surroundings and squandered our natural resources.

More and more, we have come to realise that we must overhaul our economies in a way that links economic growth and environmental protection hand in hand. We need to build green economies in which the driver of growth is a more intelligent and effective use of our resources, along with their sustainable management.

Put simply, we need to be a lot smarter in the way we exploit our resources – whether it is our fish at sea or our forests on land – so that we can extract the most income from them for our development needs but still protect them so that we can keep living off them, now and into the future.

The draft Green Growth Framework you will consider at this Summit flows from the commitment I made two years ago to support the decisions made at the Rio Plus 20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil. Since then, my Government has actively championed the pursuit of green growth at both the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Islands Development Forum.

In developing this draft Framework, Fiji is taking the lead on our region. We’ve had to think for ourselves what is required rather than look to others because very few developing countries, let alone small island developing states, have embarked on this journey before. When it’s completed, this Green Growth Framework will be one that is truly home grown, truly Fijian. And it will benefit not only Fijians but be ready to serve as a model for our island neighbours, who look to us for leadership on this issue as they do on other things relating to their own development.

We all know the challenges – the downside of our effort to develop our nation and raise the living standards of our people. We are generating too much waste and have been slow to embrace items that are bio-degradable. There is too much pollution, both on land and at sea, that is threatening a range of precious ecosystems and the quality of our arable land. And our dependence on fossil fuels has become not only an environmental issue but a huge economic burden, with a national fuel bill of one-billion dollars a year.

In his recent tour of our Pacific neighbours, His Excellency our President reminded the people of every country he visited that we all share a personal responsibility as Pacific Islanders to protect our immediate surroundings. It means picking up rubbish when you see it, picking up those plastic bags and bottles that are clogging our beaches and water ways and disposing of them properly. But just as the responsibility is on individual citizens to care for our environment, the same applies to policy makers in government and the business community. We need more scrutiny of development proposals, not less, to ensure they meet the proper standards.

Whilst sustainability and protection of the environment is a priority for my Government, it is equally important that any policy developed needs to be consistent with all of Government’s policies in relation to growth. This *“Green Growth”* policy will compliment the Trade Policy Framework being developed by the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

Trade and investment play an important role in the growth of a country. Therefore, the *“Green Growth”* policy needs to ensure that it is not an impediment to developing new areas of investments and trade.

Economic growth should be broad-based and inclusive. I happen to regard our stewardship of our nation’s resources as a sacred trust.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, we gather here today not only to embrace new ways of doing things for ourselves but for future generations. We need to place sustainability at the core of everything we do.

And, of course, the draft Framework includes the concept that was at the heart of the inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum last year of green growth going hand in hand with blue growth – the sustainable development of our marine environment. It underscores the importance for Fiji to take steps to preserve the fishing resources in our Exclusive Economic Zone.

Next week, many of us will be gathering again in Nadi for the second Pacific Islands Development Forum – our unique grand coalition of Pacific governments, civil society groups and members of the business community. Little did we realise when we embarked on the idea of the PIDF that it would capture the collective imagination of our region in the way that it has.

Next week, not only will we have more Pacific governments and other stakeholders attending than last year, but many more development partners from around the world. And it will be our unique privilege to welcome to Fiji for the first time, the President of Indonesia, His Excellency Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

The presence in our country of this great man will be a significant honour - the leader of the most populous country in our immediate region and one that has made a successful transition itself to a vibrant genuine democracy.

Among other things, it shows that Fiji matters, Fiji is punching above its weight in regional and global affairs. Our voice is not only being heard more and is more respected but we have also provided a voice for others to be heard. This includes not only the governments that have joined us in the PIDF but those civil society groups and business leaders that represent the grassroots in our societies. These are the people who were excluded from the Pacific Islands Forum but are now centre stage at the PIDF. And they are the voices of those who ultimately matter above all else - the ordinary men and women who we are all here to serve.

I spoke at the first PIDF of us all forming *“a grand coalition throughout the Pacific to protect our environment in order to make sure that development is sustainable and that the common good comes before sectional interests, so that we leave the Pacific to our children and grandchildren in a better state than when we inherited it”.*

That crusade continues and I ask you all to place it at the forefront of your deliberations here.

In closing, I would like to thank the organisers and especially the Asian Development Bank for its financial assistance. And with those words, it gives me great pleasure to declare this first ever National Summit on Green Growth open.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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