



Honourable J.V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry

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## SPEECH AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY OF THE REACH PROGRAMME

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Grand Pacific Hotel  
SUVA

Mon. 20 April, 2015  
1400 Hours

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The Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation,

Your Excellency the Ambassador of Japan,

Your Excellencies, other Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

The Resident Representative of the United Nations  
Development Programme and UN Resident Co-ordinator,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

I'm delighted to be here this afternoon to say a few words at the signing ceremony for an important

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initiative between the Fijian Government, the Government of Japan and the United Nations Development Programme, to improve the position of the Fijian people and their access to social services, justice and gender equality.

We are all grateful for any initiative that improves the position of Fijians who are disadvantaged or require special assistance.

So I want to warmly thank the Government and people of Japan for the **\$2.7 million dollars** they have provided for this initiative, which will be administered by the UNDP in partnership with my Government.

We regard the Japanese people as friends of long standing. And while we have been through some challenging times in recent years in our government to government relationship, that is all behind us.

I look forward to travelling to Japan next month for the Pacific Alliance Leaders Meeting, otherwise known as the PALM Summit, in which Japan and the Pacific Island nations will gather to strengthen our relations even further.

For Fiji's part, we intend to work closely with Japan on all aspects of our bilateral relationship and I especially look forward to my discussions with the Japanese Prime Minister, H.E. Mr Shinzo Abe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The project we are launching today is designed to enhance the opportunities of Fijians living in our nation's urban, rural and maritime areas.

It is called the REACH Programme and means exactly that - reaching out to boost the *“Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion”* for rural and urban Fijians.

Its philosophy mirrors that of the Fijian Constitution - one of social inclusion, justice, transparency and accountable governance.

It's about boosting access by disadvantaged Fijians to legal and social services, no matter who they are or where they live. And it compliments and reinforces my Government's existing programmes to ensure that every Fijian gets the same opportunities.

We are building capacity with this initiative – hand in hand with the Japanese Government and UNDP – to ensure that more Fijians have the same access to those rights and privileges that form the centrepiece of any progressive nation.

As I've said many times before, my Government is committed to building a nation in which every Fijian has equal opportunity to lead fulfilling lives, earn a decent income and to receive the services any

Government has a responsibility to provide. Whether it is access to education, adequate health facilities and all of those things that are now enshrined in our Bill of Rights - the centrepiece of our Constitution and supreme law.

As a developing country, our aspirations to improve the lives of our people cannot always be met from our own resources. So we are grateful to all of our development partners - in this case Japan - for the assistance you are giving us to improve the lives of every Fijian.

On behalf of the nation, I want to say *vinaka vakalevu* and assure the Japanese people, that working with the UNDP, we will ensure that their generosity goes to those who need it most.

I'm especially pleased to see the emphasis in this Programme on gender equality. Because empowering

our women and giving them the opportunity to build better lives for themselves and their families is a cause particularly dear to my own heart.

Thank you again for this initiative and the opportunity to be here with you today to launch it.

I wish you all the very best as our international partners work with our Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to implement it.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you.

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