



SPEECH BY MRS M. BAINIMARAMA - LAUNCHING FIJI'S READ TO LEAD PROGRAMME

Pure Fiji Gallery
VATUWAQA

Wed. 15th Apr. 2015
1500 Hours

Representatives of the Australian High Commission,
Representatives of the Fiji Water Foundation,
The Office Bearers and Supporters of Vision Fiji,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I am honoured to have been asked to be the Patron of Vision Fiji's "*Read To Lead*" Programme, which as you all know, is designed to create a love of reading among our children and improve their literacy.

I know I can speak for every mother in this room and every mother in Fiji when I say that developing reading skills is one of the most important things we

can do to prepare our children for what we all hope will be a lifetime of learning.

The local NGO, Vision Fiji, has been set up to promote children's literacy across 732 primary schools in Fiji.

The first phase - or pilot phase - of this Programme is targeting, as a priority, those primary schools that have the least resources. So we are focusing - in the initial stages - on the children who need assistance most.

Some of these Schools have only one room with twenty or fewer students. Many come from disadvantaged backgrounds and homes where the only book might be a Bible or hymn book or some other religious publication. So there is no question about the level of need and also no question about our determination to transform the lives of these children through a love of books.

In this pilot phase, 110 schools are receiving assistance from the Australian High Commission's Direct Assistance Programme and 220 schools are receiving additional support from the Fiji Water Foundation.

I want to warmly thank both the Australian Government and Fiji Water for the wonderful support they are giving our children to make them better readers.

So far, Vision Fiji has covered 330 schools but we still have another 402 schools which require assistance. So this is an ongoing Programme. And I appeal to every Fijian capable of doing so - and especially our corporate friends - to give whatever donations you can to enable Vision Fiji to achieve its objective of covering every Primary School in Fiji.

What these schools are getting is an instant library called an "*Everyday Books Box Library*" that includes 250 books at five different reading levels.

So children with different reading skills will have access to a range of books - both fiction and non-fiction - that are either well-loved classics or other titles that children want to read.

Vision Fiji has invested a lot of time and effort making sure these books are relevant to Fiji. They have all been approved by the Fijian Ministry of Education and the Government is also arranging delivery through the Ministry's Library Services of Fiji.

As well as the books themselves, the "*Everyday Books Box Library Set*" includes teaching resources, a CD-ROM, activity guides and lesson plans for teachers.

It is all about creating a love of reading among our children, getting them away from the television and electronic games, to pick up a book and open up the world of knowledge that literature can provide our young people.

I want to fire the imaginations of everyone about what we can achieve with this Programme. It is an important part of the education revolution now sweeping Fiji and which, as you all know, the Prime Minister regards as his Government's most important achievement.

I also want to fire the imaginations of every young person in Fiji about what is possible if they develop a love of reading. As the slogan says, *"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader"*.

It is a journey that I would like to see every Fijian child take as we open up a world of opportunity for our young people and develop the clever country that we all hope Fiji can be.

Again, thank you for all the work that you have done for our children and thank you for giving me the honour of being your patron and addressing you today. I wish the Programme every success now and in the years ahead.

Vinaka vakalevu, Thank you.
