**HON PM BAINIMARAMA AT THE LAUNCH OF THE REHABILITATED MEDIUM WAVE TRANSMISSION**

**8/11/2017**

The Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for

Communications;
Your Excellency, the Ambassador of the Government of Japan;
The Chairman and Board of FBC;
The CEO, Management and Staff of FBC;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here this morning as we launch the newly rehabilitated medium wave AM infrastructure and transmission – managed by our national broadcaster, the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation.

We are nation spread out across over 300 islands and we are a people separated by vast oceans and seas. But today, we can celebrate that we’ve brought our people – our Fijian family – a bit closer, by extending the reach of AM radio broadcasts to every Fijian and every corner of our islands.

This is a truly historic moment, as never before has every Fijian been able to simply switch on the radio and instantly become part of our national conversation – the dialogue and flow of information that keep us connected, even across tremendous distance.

As of today, a Fijian living in Vanua Balavu, Lakeba or Ovalau, can turn on the radio and join listeners in Nausori, Lautoka or any one of our urban centres across a range of AM programming. And villages in the most remote pockets of our interior and in the furthest reaches of our outer islands can tune into AM radio at every hour of the day every day of the week.

With this upgrade, we’ve achieved 100 per cent coverage of our islands. That means every Fijian in every community in Fiji can now tune to clear and dependable AM signals that will broadcast programmes on the Radio Fiji One and Gold stations.

That doesn’t only mean we can all now tune into Morning Glory, Vakekeli or listen to some of our favourite music. It means we all now have access to critical flows of information – programming on youth development, women’s issues, health, agriculture and many other important topics. That wide range of programming brings us information that can be extremely useful in our day to day lives, and that is vital to our national development. And the right to access information is one of the most important rights my Government is sworn to uphold.

That is why we’ve undertaken such a massive effort to bring high quality education throughout our islands, so our children can be taught accurate, relevant and up-to-date material. That is why we’re expanding our network of cellular data and ICT services. That is why, by December, we will extend the reach of free to air digital television to all of Fiji, using satellites and terrestrial technology to bring a whole other range of programming to Fijian communities. And that is why we’ve pursued this upgrade of our AM transmission. Because my Government believes that access to information is essential to a well-functioning democracy, as it grants full and meaningful participation in our national development and empowers our communities to realise greater opportunities.

Access to information is also the single greatest defence for any community’s best interests. Because when members of a community have the most current news and up-to-date information, they can challenge and condemn any who seek to use bad information – those who use lies and deceit – to take advantage of our people.

To all of our communities benefitting from this upgrade: you can now be more secure in your knowledge. You can now demand better of those meant to serve you. And you now have an even greater role in the conversations, the debates and the processes that make our democracy work and that define the Fiji we will become.

When we first signed the MOU with the Government of Japan to launch this project, I spoke on my own fundamental belief that information belongs to the Fijian people, and that access to information is the life blood of our nation.
Now that this project is complete, we’ve given more information to more of our people, and we’ve taken a big step towards becoming a more connected, transparent and accountable society.

We’ve also made Fiji a safer place to call home. Many of the communities that are benefitting from this upgrade were on the frontlines of Cyclone Winston in February of last year. And in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone’s devastation, some of our maritime communities were cut off from communication and, as a result, they were cut-off from information that could save lives and be a beacon of reassurance to affected communities.

The big benefit of this new AM radio infrastructure is that it is far more resilient to severe weather than FM systems. We already know that storms like Winston are only going to become more frequent and more severe.

And when those storms do arrive, this new transmission system will give us a much better chance of relaying disaster-related information that can ready our communities and keep our people safe.

That is something that really cannot be priced. And I’d like to extend a big thank you, a big vinaka vakalevu to the Japanese Government and people for their invaluable support in making this project happen. Their assistance towards this rehabilitation is a clear sign of their commitment to Fiji and the Fijian people, and of their support to my Government’s vision to improve the lives of all Fijians – regardless of where in Fiji they call home.

We all know well that providing radio coverage to every Fijian community – especially those in our outer islands – isn’t commercially viable. But we’ve pursued this project through FBC for a far more important reason. Some Fijian communities are a long way away from our major urban areas, and their geography can make life more difficult.
But it is my Government’s duty to make special efforts to bring them the same level of opportunity and services that are enjoyed on Viti Levu, or in any of our larger population centres.

That’s what this newly rehabilitated transmission represents. A special effort we’ve made to bring regular programmes, information on Government services and initiatives, and critical emergency information to our outer island communities. And that effort is part of our long-term strategy to bring better education, infrastructure, services and jobs to our maritime communities to give those Fijians who call them home an equal shot at bettering their lives and raising their standards of living.

I’d also like to thank FBC - the Board, CEO and staff for their role in this rehabilitation and for committing to carry out the maintenance of this project in the years to come. Vinaka vakalevu for helping us spread the enormous benefits of reliable AM radio transmissions to every Fijian, and for the work you do every day as our national broadcaster, developing innovative and entertaining programming that keeps the Fijian people informed and brings us closer together as a nation. We also would like to thank you for the hundreds of hours of public service broadcast for which we pay you a modest sum but in return ordinary Fijians receive more hours of broadcast than what we actually pay you for.

FBC has put forward an impressive slate of television and radio programming that inspires, educates and involves the Fijian people. I’ve been told that effort has paid off, and your audience is the best it’s ever been in both television and radio – so keep up the good work.

I know all of our communities, especially in our outer islands, have awaited this day for many years. And I’m very excited that we’ve been able to realise that dream and spread our radio network to reach every community in Fiji. I wish you all happy listening.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.