**HON PM BAINIMARAMA GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY OF THE ITAUKEI LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

**6/28/2017**

The Members of the Korokula Land Owning Unit,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Cola Vina and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to be here today as we celebrate a project that marks the beginning of a new era of prosperity and empowerment for the iTaukei people, as we break ground on the first-ever Government funded development of iTaukei land.

The motivation for this project, along with that of so many others that my Government is carrying out across our islands, is rooted in my deeply held belief to assist all Fijians without discrimination and recognise the ability and ingenuity of all our citizens. All over Fiji, we have people – men and women with limitless potential – who simply need the means to find success – the means to build better lives for themselves, and uplift those around them to do the same. That is the vision we are working to realise for every Fijian. Yesterday I was giving out micro-finance grants to assist Fijians to participate in small businesses and today we are here to assist iTaukei landowners to directly capitalise from their landownership.

This afternoon I will also attend a similar ground breaking ceremony for three other such developments in Vuda, Saweni and Wairebetia.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the iTaukei people today, operate from a position of strength unrivalled by any other time in our history. The land and rights of the iTaukei are protected and enshrined for all time in the Fijian Constitution – the supreme law of the land that governs every action of my Government.

Of course, even in the midst of such protections and achievements, we’ve seen time and time again, the usual suspects in the Opposition go through the same tired charade of spreading fear and spinning lies – all in their attempt to deceive the iTaukei people to further their own political and personal ambitions. But, Ladies and Gentlemen, the facts speak for themselves. And the fact is, not one inch of iTaukei land has been lost under my Government, and today around 91 per cent of the land in Fiji is owned by the iTaukei.

Never have the iTaukei been more secure, never before have they had more opportunity to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. And never before have young iTaukei men and women had a better shot of realising their dreams and aspirations for the future. Indeed never before have all iTaukei people been treated equally amongst themselves. My Government assists all iTaukei people equally. In providing Government service and assistance we don’t make a distinction between chief and commoner.

All iTaukei people are also entitled to the rights my Government has always fought to uphold for all Fijians, including the right to and access to free education, scholarships, tertiary education loans and access to roads, water, electricity, subsidised bus fares, free water and subsidised electricity to name a few.

But even with these unprecedented guarantees, my Government wanted to do more. We didn’t only want to protect the ownership of iTaukei land and the rights of the iTaukei, we wanted to do one better by providing a solid foundation for growth that would empower iTaukei people and that is what this project is all about.

iTaukei people in Fiji have long faced the issue of being asset-rich but cash poor. Of course one of the reasons this has been is because the politicians of the past and some even today politicise land ownership. Rather than assisting iTaukei people to benefit economically and financially from the landownership, they simply did nothing about it. Rather than telling landowners that if they developed the land themselves and they will not only become cash rich but also create more wealth and opportunities for the country, they sought to only look after themselves.
I am here to tell you that my Government thinks differently. We want you to realise benefits from your land. We want you to become more economically and financially powerful. We want you to lease your lands for long term leases and get the right rental paid for it. And we will as we are doing today give you the funding to develop your land so you will do precisely that. My Government is a practical government. We know that many landowning units don’t have the upfront funds to carry out such developments. I also know that because of the non-availability of such funds many landowning units were vulnerable - vulnerable to interests with far deeper pockets that sought to lease their land, add value through capital investment and make a killing, leasing that same land out to other parties.

Through this initiative of my Government that will no longer be the case. We will build the roads and connect your subdivision to water and electricity so you can directly sell the leases yourself to make a financial gain.

This subdivision project at Yadua is one of the first four projects to benefit under this grant, with the development of 13 residential lots at a total cost of nearly $2.5 million.
When you lease this land after the development is completed it will benefit every Fijian. It will benefit you as the developer, it will provide economic opportunities to small and medium sized businesses in this area, there will be more construction thereby providing more jobs and it will give confidence to investors to invest more through security of 99 year leases. This subdivision will create more economic opportunities for Fiji and all Fijians.

I am very excited to watch this land develop and serve the people of Yadua, and many more Fijians in the years to come. To the people of Yadua, this is your land today, and it will be your land for all time. Take this opportunity to make the best possible use of what is yours, and build something that will support your community for generations.

Vinaka vakalevu - Thank you.