

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER, 2018

The Parliament resumed at 9.33 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 29th November, 2018, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Clarification

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker. As a matter of correction, Standing Order 32(3) I mentioned in my address yesterday on Page 167 of the Uncorrected Copy of the *Daily Hansard*, that His Excellency was a Cabinet Minister in the Prime Minister Qarase's Government. He was an Assistant Minister, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Actually that was not a point of order, it was just clarification and we will amend our Report likewise.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to the last day of sitting for this week.

I also welcome members of the public who are joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet, and listening to the radio. I thank you for your interest in Parliament.

Membership of Committees

Honourable Members, with reference to my announcement of increasing the membership of Standing Committees to seven, I wish to inform that the Business Committee met again yesterday afternoon to confirm the membership which has reverted to five with two reserves, after a vote was

taken. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 115(4), I hereby advise Parliament of the following appointments:

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

1. Honourable Alvick Maharaj
2. Honourable Joseph Nand
3. Honourable Vijendra Prakash
4. Honourable Aseri Radrodro
5. Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu

Reserves

1. Honourable Vijay Nath
2. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi

Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights

1. Honourable Alvick Maharaj
2. Honourable Rohit Sharma
3. Honourable Dr. Salik Govind
4. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu
5. Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua

Reserves

1. Honourable Vijendra Prakash
2. Honourable Niko Nawaikula

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

1. Honourable Vijay Nath
2. Honourable Veena Bhatnagar
3. Honourable George Vegnathan
4. Honourable Inosi Kuridrani
5. Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau

Reserves

1. Honourable Ritesh Sharma
2. Honourable Viliame Gavoka

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

1. Honourable Sanjay Kirpal
2. Honourable Jale Sigarara
3. Honourable Alexander O'Connor
4. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca
5. Honourable Peceli Vosanibola

Reserves

1. Honourable Selai Adimaitoga
2. Honourable Jese Saukuru

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

1. Honourable Viam Pillay
2. Honourable George Vegnathan
3. Honourable Alipate Nagata
4. Honourable Salote Radrodro
5. Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu

Reserves

1. Honourable Vijendra Prakash
2. Honourable Simione Rasova

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

1. Honourable Alexander O'Connor
2. Honourable Dr. Salik Govind
3. Honourable Selai Adimaitoga
4. Honourable Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua
5. Honourable Anare Jale

Reserves

1. Honourable Joseph Nitya Nand
2. Honourable Mikaele Leawere

In line with Standing Orders 116(1) and (2), the Secretary-General will convene the first meeting of each Standing Committee and also notify Committee Members of the date for the first meeting once nominations from the Opposition have been confirmed in Parliament.

The membership for Select Committees are as follows:

Business Committee

1. Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs
2. Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications
3. Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu, Leader of the Government in Parliament and Minister for Defence and National Security
4. Hon. Alvick Maharaj, Government Whip
5. Hon. Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka, Leader of the Opposition
6. Hon. Professor Biman Prasad, NFP Leader
7. Hon. Lynda Tabuya, SODELPA Whip
8. Honourable Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua, NFP Whip

House Committee

1. Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar
2. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Rosy Akbar
3. Government Whip, Honourable Alvick Maharaj
4. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa
5. Honourable Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua

Standing Orders Committee

1. Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu, Leader of the Government in Parliament
2. Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications (*substitute*)
3. Hon. Alvick Maharaj, Government Whip
4. Hon. Lynda Tabuya, Opposition Whip
5. Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua, NFP Whip

Privileges Committee

1. Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar
2. Attorney-General, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum
3. Leader of the Government in Parliament, Honourable Inia Seruiratu
4. Government Whip, Honourable Alvick Maharaj
5. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka
6. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi

Reserve

Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to table his Reports.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), I would like to present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2017 Annual Report;
2. Office of the President 2015 Annual Report;
3. COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: Second Semi-Annual Report (1 November 2017-30 April 2018);
4. Fourth Quarter Appropriation Statement (1 May 2018-31 July 2018);
5. First Quarter Appropriation Statement (1 August 2018-31 October 2018);
6. Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance 2017 Annual Report;
7. Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2017-July 2018 Report;
8. Fiji Development Bank 2017 Annual Report;
9. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited 2016 Annual Report;
10. Fiji Meat Industry Board 2014 Annual Report;
11. Fiji Electricity Authority 2017 Annual Report;
12. Water Authority of Fiji 2013-2014 Annual Report;

13. Housing Authority 2015 Annual Report; and
14. Public Rental Board 2016 Annual Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you, please, hand the Reports to the Secretary-General?

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs:

1. iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2017 Annual Report;
2. Housing Authority 2015 Annual Report; and
3. Public Rental Board 2016 Annual Report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Office of the President 2015 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs:

1. Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance 2017 Annual Report;
2. Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2017 to July 2018 Report;
3. Fiji Development Bank 2017 Annual Report;
4. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited 2016 Annual Report;
5. Fiji Meat Industry Board 2014 Annual Report; and
6. Fiji Electricity Authority 2017 Annual Report.

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following reports to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:

1. COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: Second Semi-Annual Report;
2. Fourth Quarter Appropriation Statement for the period 1 May 2018 to 31 July 2018; and
3. First Quarter Appropriation Statement for the period 1 August 2018 to 31 October 2018.

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Water Authority of Fiji 2013-2014 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

I now call upon the Minister for Defence and National Security to table his Report.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), I present the Fiji Police Force Annual Report August 2016-July 2017 to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Fiji Police Force Annual

Report August 2016-July 2017 to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

I now call upon the Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports to table this Report.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), I present the 2017 Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee Annual Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the 2017 Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

I now call upon the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to table her Report.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), I present the 2017 Fiji National University Annual Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), I refer the 2017 Fiji National University Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now proceed with the first speaker on today's batting order. I will now call upon the Honourable Inia Seruiratu to deliver his response to the Address by His Excellency the President.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to add my voice to those Honourable Members who have spoken before me and expressing my gratitude to His Excellency the President, Major-General Retired Jioji Konrote for His most gracious speech, while opening Parliament on Monday.

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you, first of all, for your reappointment as Speaker of the Parliament for the next four years and for the poise and tact with which you had guided Parliamentary proceedings in the last four years. It is quite obvious, Madam Speaker, that the role of Speaker requires a sense of fairness, a bit of humour and tonnes of patience. You so graciously displayed all those attributes since your election to your high office in 2014 and for that you ought to be commended, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also congratulate the Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, for her appointment to the high office, and to have two women in the roles of Speaker and Deputy Speaker is testament to the progress we have made as a nation and which we should all be proud of.

I also wish to thank the women Parliamentarians and I wish to congratulate all of them and allow me this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to also congratulate all Members of this Honourable House for their election by the people of Fiji as Members of Parliament. Let us together focus on our collective duty to serve the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my earnest appreciation to all the voters for their confidence and trust in my ability and aptitude, to be able to effectively represent them and their concerns in this august House for the next four years.

Madam Speaker, additionally, I also wish to acknowledge the hard work and perseverance of my small team in Tailevu, consisting of Mr. Sakiusa Rokotakala, Peni Koroi, Joeli and Solomone Seruiratu, Paula Lagi and Josefa Bau of Dawasamu.

I also wish to acknowledge the hardworking team in Cakaudrove of Isaia Nainoca, Mikaele Vosayaco, Bryce Seru, Shankar of Savusavu, Beni Are of Rabi, Petero Anare, Samuela Qolikoro, Poe Devo, Taniela Cokanasiga (Senior and Junior), Naibe Viniana, Aloesi and Viliame Duidui, Mosese Naua, Viliame Mataikoro, Mateo Malake, Sefo Lalasava and Ilaitia Vuniwaqa.

I also wish to acknowledge two friends in Lautoka, Mr. Waisea Tuidraki and Mr. Rohan Prasad, and the ANCF Family for their prayers, Madam Speaker.

In Nabavatu, Macuata, I wish to also acknowledge Mr. Ponipate Vonuqaqa. I wish to thank them again for their support and encouragement and to them all, I owe much gratitude, Madam Speaker.

I also would like to pay a special tribute to my wife, Litea, and my three children - Kaminieli, Joyce and Christina and, of course, my extended family.

Madam Speaker, it is with a mixed sense of honour and duty that I stand in this august House to deliver this address as the Minister for Defence and National Security. Considering the weight of the responsibility that is demanded of the role and I am deeply honoured, however, Madam Speaker, that the Honourable Prime Minister has found me worthy to be appointed to take up this role.

Madam Speaker, part of the reason, I have mixed feelings about this role is the size of the boots that I will have to fill, left vacant by my predecessor, the former Minister for Defence and National Security, the Honourable Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, to whom I pay tribute for the passion and commitment with which he had served in that capacity.

I will endeavour to carry on from where he left off, Madam Speaker. While defence and national security can be a strange animal to grapple with, I have some degree of confidence with my background and military training, Madam Speaker.

I joined the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in 1987 as an officer cadet and, of course, left albeit reluctantly in 2007 upon my appointment as Divisional Commissioner (Northern). I was holding the post of Commanding Officer of the Force's Training Group at the time.

Among the highlights of my military career were tours of duty in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) Sinai, United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) and, of course, Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) as well.

Among the other highlights, Madam Speaker, were my two-year posting as an officer instructor at the New Zealand Officer Cadet Training School in Waiouru from 1997 to 1999 and my training at the New Zealand Joint Command Staff College in Wellington, New Zealand. These postings and trainings exposed me to international relations and diplomacy, strategic management, leadership command preparation, advance leadership, and taught me the sensitivities of cultural diversity, and these are the experiences that coupled with my other military appointments, will augur well with my current appointment as Minister for Defence and National Security.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President urged us in his inauguration Address as Members of this august House to learn from the traumatic and destructive events of our past, and never to take the fatal mistake of moving forward while disregarding the lessons of our past.

Paramount among my priorities, Madam Speaker, I, as Minister responsible for defence and the security of our nation, will be to ensure that those events referred to by His Excellency are not repeated.

Madam Speaker, we have a national security strategy in place which is a strategic document aimed at addressing emerging and complex threats confronting our nation, thus enhancing our national security.

Our national security strategy, Madam Speaker, is founded on Government's vision for a prosperous, safe, secure and harmonious society which emanates from our collective desire to provide for all Fijians a safe and secure environment where we can all live meaningfully and build prosperity for us and for our future generation.

The document, Madam Speaker, provides an integrated framework intended to address our multi-faceted security demands, and provides the foundation for modernising and re-positioning our institutional structures to be able to deal with all types of threats to Fiji's sovereignty and our people.

Madam Speaker, we can consider ourselves fortunate that we are located in the part of the world that is relatively peaceful. We have never engaged in war or conflict of the magnitude experienced in other parts of the world. Some years ago, a discussion on how to secure Fiji, let alone the Pacific, would have been considered absurd.

But indications, Madam Speaker, are that threats to our national security are here at our doorsteps. Recent incidences on our very shores point to the fact that we must now be on our toes.

Madam Speaker, attempts by some foreign nationals to skim Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) in the Western Division in February 2016, and the drug find in Southern Lau in July this year, are indicators that should hasten all efforts to strengthen our national security.

Madam Speaker, national security must now be considered a national good. We must now all ask ourselves: what can we do to support our national security efforts? We must invest in our national security for growth and progress.

Madam Speaker, questions have often been asked on the increased budgetary allocations to the Military and the Police. The competing needs that we have as a developing nation is fully appreciated - the need for basic utilities, roads, housing, schools, hospitals, et cetera, and every dollar spent on building our Military and Police Forces is a dollar taken from those other needs.

Madam Speaker, building and enhancing the capacities of our Military and Police Forces are absolutely necessary to ensure that we are able to defend and secure our nation for our own citizens and may we have no home invasions, no snatching of jewellery from our citizens as they roam our streets

in our towns and cities, Madam Speaker, and, of course, making it attractive to investors, where tourists would want to visit and one where citizens live together in genuine harmony.

With the earnings, Madam Speaker, from investments, tourism and our combined participation in the capitalist economy, Government should be able to allocate more funds for social and infrastructural development, better hospital facilities and educational development.

Madam Speaker, I raise the issue of security and growth because they are related. Economic growth and a safe nation are deeply interconnected. On one hand, Madam Speaker, the uncertainties associated with an unsafe environment may reduce investment and the pace of economic development, thus negating our progress and growth as a nation. This means, therefore, that if we were to hasten our growth and development as a nation, among our national priority must be the strengthening of our security and our defence capabilities.

Madam Speaker, Singapore recognised this very earlier on and invested heavily on their national security and defence capabilities which, in turn, catapulted their transition from a third world country to where they are today in a very short span of time.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President, while referring to our economy in his inauguration Address stated at Page 4 of the *Daily Hansard* on Monday, 26th November, 2018, I quote:

“... Government has shown that we have a recipe that works”.

It is true, that recipe, Madam Speaker, is premised on the stability and strength of our national security.

Madam Speaker, we have proven on the international stage through our peacekeeping missions that we produce some of the finest and bravest soldiers and police officers and officers of Correctional Services and National Fire Authority, who have joined in peacekeeping assignments and for that, our men and women of the Disciplined Forces have received commendation from all over the world. I, too, commend them, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we are committed to the United Nations Charter and its tenet to achieve global peace. In this regard, we will seek to maintain our level of involvement in international peacekeeping missions in furtherance of this endeavour, and considering as well the benefits that Fiji has gained from our participation in those missions.

Madam Speaker, we should also be mindful that Fiji, while being acclaimed internationally for our commitment to international peacekeeping, is not immune to the global trends of cost-cutting and doing more with less initiatives, which can result in the reduction of the number of our deployed troops. We, therefore, must stand ready to manage the impact of those decisions when they come to hand.

Madam Speaker, we now have all heard the vibes that our troops will be further reduced from Lebanon in December this year. Our team is already working on a plan to mitigate the impact on the institution and the personnel who will be affected, should this become a reality, Madam Speaker.

While we have proven our mettle at the global stage, part of my mission, Madam Speaker, will be to ensure that the same level of professionalism and commitment which our Forces had demonstrated at the international level is maintained at the local level, to continue to guarantee the security and safety of our people.

Lest we forget, Madam Speaker, our war veterans, whose commitment and courage have ensured that we are able to live in peace today, that must always be remembered. We owe them a great deal.

Madam Speaker, I will work closely with the Returned Soldiers and Ex-Servicemen Association of Fiji, to ensure that the welfare of our veterans and their families are well-catered for and I also wish to mention, Madam Speaker, that under this Government, Police have been included in these welfare programmes and likewise, we have also remembered our Christmas Island Veterans a few years ago.

Madam Speaker, before concluding, I just wish to highlight again before this august House some of the issues that were raised from the other side of the House during the delivery of speeches. There is something that I would like to urge all the Honourable Members of this House after taking our oaths and affirmations on Monday, Madam Speaker, if we can assist in empowering our people rather than exploiting them, particularly in areas where they lack understanding or knowledge.

Let me talk about land issues, Madam Speaker. Land, since the iTaukei Lands Trust Act 1905, has been secured, and it will remain so, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I was referring to the iTaukei Lands Trust Act 1905, Honourable Member. Then we also have the iTaukei Lands Trust Act 1940.

I wish to say here, Madam Speaker, that a lot of our people, unfortunately and particularly the *i Taukei* have very little understanding on their rights under these two laws. In 1905, our land have been secured, full stop, Madam Speaker. And, of course, some who have agreed through the 60 percent agreement have opted to have their land utilised for lease purposes, which is important for our economic growth and development. So I am urging all Honourable Members of the House because this issue keeps coming up, particularly when the other side of the House is not in Government, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- True!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- In 1987, this issue was brought up to our people, Madam Speaker. Again in 2000, again in 2014, again in 2018! Only when they are not on this side of the House, land is under threat.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- But, Madam Speaker, when we took our oath and affirmation, we have made it specifically clear that we will be abiding by the Constitution, and this is further enhanced by Sections 27 to 30 of the Constitution and, of course, other laws of the country. I am referring to two specific laws which are currently in existence in this country since 1905.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, this is where we need to work together. As I have stated, a lot of *i Taukei* do not know the correlation between these two laws, particularly when the land is outside their reserves, Madam Speaker, under the 1940 Act. What are the powers that are with ILTB and where is their responsibility? This is where most of the misunderstanding is, Madam Speaker, but the land is secure.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, in most of the meetings that I go to, I always assure landowners, "Land ownership is a non-issue because of these two Acts and, of course, the Constitution, Sections 27 to 30."

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- This is the question: I always emphasise land utilisation.

Madam Speaker, as we speak, 91 percent of the land in Fiji belongs to *i Taukei*, but we talk about the elephant in the room. Why do we not utilise this land well so that we can grow the economy, and improve the lives of our people, Madam Speaker?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Bulitavu stated that the Committee for the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) failed - 80 percent of the non-renewed leases have been renewed through CBUL.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT.COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- This Government subsidised the unimproved capital value from 6 percent to 10 percent and as I stand today, we have given *i Taukei* landowners \$60 million. Is that a failure?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, land is secure, if there is anything, I urge all Honourable Members in this House - let us utilise the land, and I speak as a former Minister for Agriculture. We are going around and have established a collection centre now in Dama, Bua; we have a collection centre now in Savusavu, Cakaudrove; we have established AMO collection centre in Nacocolevu; but we do not have any *dalo*, *dalo ni tana* or *tavioka*, Madam Speaker. We have 91 percent of the land but we are not utilising the land. If there is one thing that we talk to our people about, Madam Speaker, after this session, let us go and talk about land utilisation, not land ownership.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Where is the tractor?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Now he wants the tractor.

I need more time, Madam Speaker. Let me talk about the Ex-Servicemen's Association. Let me just assure the Honourable Members that this Government has increased the allowance to our peacekeepers to \$130.00 a day, even more than what the United Nations is giving.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- In a year, this Government gives \$43,000 to every peacekeeper regardless of rank - \$130 per day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will leave the rest to the other Members. I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. For those that drive, safe driving, do not drink too much.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Members of this House, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and to all Fijians who are listening in on the radio, watching live on television and on social media, and those who are present in the gallery: *Bula re*, good morning and *namaste* to you all. I congratulate the Speaker on her appointment and look forward to serving under her direction. Madam, your appointment as the first lady Speaker of the Fijian Parliament is a great inspiration and motivation for all other women of Fiji. The Government is also to be thanked for recognising your talent and also for fulfilling its promise of honouring men and women who have sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be sitting in the Fijian Parliament to represent the people of this country who have voted FijiFirst. I congratulate our Honourable Prime Minister and the Leader of FijiFirst for its dynamic leadership that led to a convincing victory. I will take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who had faith in me and voted for me and FijiFirst, especially the people of my hometown; the friendly North of Fiji and the Babasiga Lions of Fiji – Labasa, and the place I currently reside, that is Davuilevu Housing, Nakasi. I hope my contribution over the next four years will prove that their faith in me has been well-rewarded.

I would also like to acknowledge the following:

- My parents, Mr. Kampta Prasad and my lovely mother, Mrs. Rambha Wati Prasad of Salusalu Street, Namara, Labasa;
- My wife, Shridhhi Sharma; my daughter, Sukritah Sharma; my son, Ribhav Sharma; my brother, Mohit Sharma; his wife, Sujita Sharma; daughter, Anjali Sharma of Sydney, Australia;
- My sister, Monika Mudaliar; brother-in-law, Mr. Sam Mudaliar; their sons, Ritanch Sharma and Satyanch Sharma;
- My friends: Mr. and Mrs. Jag Ram from Sakoca, Mr. and Mrs. Manoj of Sakoca, the late Bob Hira and family, Mr. and Mrs. Steven from Nepani, Mr. and Mrs. Satish Baran of Davuilevu Housing, Mr. and Mrs. Khem Raj of Lagi Road, Waila 3B, the Dutt families, Sagar families and the Prasad families;

I would also like to acknowledge my relatives from Labasa: in Nasea, Vunika, Nagigi, Naleba, Wavuwavu, Olana, Vunivutu, Vunivasa, Taginikula, Wainikoro, Daku, Wailevu, Tabia, Seaqaqa, Dreketi: Bua, Nabouwalu, Savusavu, Loa, Buca Bay, Tukavesi, Qila-Taveuni and Matei for their tremendous support during my campaign.

I would also like to thank, Madam Speaker, all the people of Tailevu, Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka, Nadi, Sigatoka, Navua and along the Suva/Nausori corridor, especially from Wainibuku, Nakasi Farm Road, Waidamudamu, Koronivia, Dilkusha, Duilomaloma Road, Sawani, Baulevu, and not forgetting all the people of Davuilevu Housing, Nakasi and Waila 3B.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to sincerely thank all the radio friends who voted for me from around the country. At the radio stations, I was commonly known as “Double R (RR) S”.

Also, I would like to thank my campaign managers from around the country. They worked tirelessly to a well-planned Election campaign. Their experience, together with the network of volunteers around Fiji, helped me a lot.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who sacrificed their time to make sure I won. Without you, I would not be here.

Also, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all those who supported me. I will do my best to make you all proud of me. There are many people who worked late nights to make sure that I did well and I would like to simply say, "Thank you", and not forgetting all my friends who were there with me all the time.

Madam Speaker, I will now give a short introduction of my upbringing and the route to this august House. My father, Mr. Kamta Prasad was a labourer in the Garden Island of Fiji, Qila in Taveuni. With no proper education and financial background, he worked with his uncle where he gained knowledge about carpentry. He left the Garden Island to work in Labasa where he met my lovely mother, Mrs. Rambha Wati Prasad, of Taginikula, Labasa.

Currently, my parents live at Salusalu Street, Namara, Labasa. I have one brother and a sister. Although my parents had little education, they ensured that all of us (their children) received education at that time. They worked night and day to make sure all our ends were met.

My primary education began at Bethel Primary School; then followed my secondary education; Year 9 to Year 10 at Labasa Sangam College; Years 11 to 13 at Bulileka Sanatan College.

I would like to remind Honourable Members that Bulileka Sanatan College has also produced leaders. The ability to produce leaders is not exclusively to a few select schools.

My parents kept a close watch on my education and my religious upbringing. I would like to give my special thanks to Pundit Bhuwan Dutt Arya Ratna and Pundit Guru Datt Arya Ratna, of The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji, who taught me a lot about religious beliefs and to respect other religions.

After completing my education, I joined the Fiji College of Advanced Education, now Fiji National University, where I obtained my teacher education to become a qualified secondary school teacher.

Madam Speaker, besides being a Head of Department, I also rendered my service to the media industry for 19 years as a radio producer, presenter with FBC, Radio Fiji Two, Radio *Mirchi* for 13 years and then joined Communications Fiji Limited Radio Station and Radio Sargam for seven years.

At this juncture, I would like to thank all my fellow radio presenters of the above radio stations.

Madam Speaker, I am also a registered marriage officer and a Justice of the Peace. I took part in community welfare projects and sports, being a successful coach and brought glory to my last school, Baulevu High School which created history in the sporting field and for all Baulevuans. With only 260 students, Baulevu High School won the Fiji Secondary School Under 19 Soccer IDC in 2017, defeating all the big guns of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I did not have to wait too long, our Honourable Prime Minister along with our hardworking Attorney-General, have given us everything the country needed and more, for example, improvements to the infrastructure, free education, much-improved welfare assistance, equal distribution of lease money to all members of the landowning units, are just few of the many

achievements of FijiFirst. The Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable and learned Attorney-General have repeatedly assured us that there are measures in place to give this nation the Australia and New Zealand outlook.

Just a few weeks ago I had a very close friend of mine visiting Fiji. He was forced to leave Fiji during the 1987 *coup*. He was shocked to see the rapid development of our country. He now wants to return to the country he once called "home". Madam Speaker, we have to ask ourselves, "Why do so many, like my friend, want to return to Fiji, bringing their skills and knowledge from abroad?" The answer is simple, FijiFirst has progressed and developed our nation more than any other Government; secondly, more than anyone across the floor could have dreamt of.

Madam Speaker, their children are benefitting from the very policies they are now criticising. It may not happen overnight but with proper forward-planning and perseverance, we can do even more. We have a leader who has been tested and the Attorney-General, a very practical unit, and a strong line-up of representatives. Madam Speaker, we have to put our heads together and give our full co-operation to all the Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers.

The Government has done a lot of improvements in Labasa, between the Suva/Nausori corridor and throughout the country. The most noticeable one is the extension of the Labasa Market where women and men were used to bring vegetables and root crops from the interior and had to spend nights sleeping on the footpaths of Labasa Town. During rainy weather, they would wrap themselves with plastics to protect themselves from getting wet. The days of sleeping on the footpaths are gone. FijiFirst has brought these types of improvements into people's lives that make us proud Fijians.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka!*

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- The people of Labasa are resilient, the reason why I say this is because, despite going through many cyclones, flooding and drought, we continue to be part of our country's major revenue generator. Labasa plays a major role in the sugar industry and controls the rice and also the timber industry. The business community has so many times lost all their stocks during floods and cyclones, families lose almost everything, but still we continued to help build the nation.

We, as political leaders, are here to offer our fellow Fijians the hope of a better life for them and their future generation. We will all have to work together in achieving the dream. We have to be selfless and look at the wider interest of all Fijians. A lot has been done and we have more plans for the future. Further, with careful planning where every aspect of our country's unique culture is maintained, we should also embrace the future.

Madam Speaker, through FijiFirst's leadership, we have secured our children's future and set up a direction that will ensure a brighter future for everyone.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Madam Speaker, the greatest opportunity any parent in any society can give the next generation is education. With our Government's Free Education Policy, there is no discrimination amongst the rich and the poor. It is the responsibility of every parent to make sure their children get educated. Spending time with children and checking their home work and school work are the responsibilities of every parent. Spending quality time and teaching them values will see progress in our children and our nation.

Having a cultured society and the role of the family: Teaching of values, culture, tradition, language and good habits start in the family home. The grandparents, parents and others in the family

play a key role. A family is a group of people living together, generally the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to play his or her role. Parents should support their children, they have to love, care and guide and in return the children should respect and obey their parents and learn from them good habits, culture, religious values, tolerance and remain committed to their responsibilities.

We have noted a lack of love, tolerance and understanding, resulting in violence. Children are often abused which results in mental and physical violence. Young children are turning to alcohol, drugs and violence. In order to maintain a good family, strong kinship ties have to be maintained.

Madam Speaker, a good family stands firm when it is cultured by good, moral and human values. I appeal to all parents to carry out their roles faithfully and devote more time with their children to enhance family values. This way you will not only be helping your child but also helping for all to build a highly cultured society that has care and respect.

I would like to end with this quote from the great scholar and social reformer, Maharishi Swami Dayanand and Saraswati, and I quote:

“The prime object of human is to do good to the world, that is to promote physical, spiritual and social good of everyone. Our conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness and justice. No one should be content with promoting his or her good only, on the contrary, one should look for his or her good in promoting the good for all. We should dispel ignorance and promote knowledge, one should regard one's self under restriction to follow the rules of society, calculated to promote the well-being of all, while in following the rules of individual, welfare of all should be free.”

Madam Speaker, finally, knowing well that Almighty God is watching us all at all times, my prayer is that, may people of learning and wisdom take birth in our country; may there be brave men and women to protect the nation; may there be plenty of food, water and other resources for everyone; and may this nation of ours thrive and flourish, be productive; and may all who live here progress and prosper. I am confident that if we all strive with the best of intentions, we can make this happen.

Madam Speaker, God bless Fiji, *vinaka vakalevu, dhanyavaad and namaste.*

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Jale Sigarara to take the floor.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Honourable Members of the House: *Bula re* and a very good morning.

Madam Speaker, before I deliver my brief statement for this Opening Session of Parliament, I would like to first congratulate you, Madam Speaker, for another term in office as Speaker of the House of Representatives. I also wish to congratulate the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar for her appointment as Deputy Speaker. I warmly congratulate the Honourable Members for successfully contesting the 2018 General Elections and more so for securing a seat in this august House.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate our Party for being able to take up the Government role again to continue with the huge responsibilities associated with building our nation.

Madam Speaker, please, allow me to acknowledge and express my gratitude and appreciation to all those that voted for FijiFirst and show their trust and confidence in my ability to be in this

Parliament. I wish to ensure them, including those that are out there undecided that the FijiFirst Government Leader, and those of us sitting with him here on this side of the House, will deliver all that we have promised.

I would also like to acknowledge those that worked tirelessly during the month to ensure that I reach this level in my public servant career. Thank you very much to the following:

- My campaign team and Managers: Tevita Robanakadavu, Viliame Ratudradra, Peni Yaruma and Tevita Savou;
- The people of the Villages in Bua: Nubunikadamu, Daria, Cogea, the Catholic Communities from Cavaga, Vuya, Nakorovou, Nawaido, Kilaka, Makolei, and to our voters in Batiniuciwai Settlement;
- My relatives in Naduri, Suva and around Fiji and abroad.

Thank you very much and *vinaka vakalevu*.

Last but not least, my strong pillar, my wife, Merelesita, and sons: Maikeli, Ilaitia, Jemesa and Sitiveni and their families; to my beautiful granddaughters: Mere, Loata, Mareta and Joyce, for their cute smiles and kisses, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, indeed the people have spoken and regardless of which side of the House you are sitting, Honourable Members, the message is this: Our differing political ideologies must be acknowledged and respected, nevertheless the choice and the voice of the majority should be our beacon of hope and confidence in a democratic leadership that the citizens of Fiji have again entrusted the elected government and my side of this Chambers to be responsible for, within the next four years.

Madam Speaker, in the same vein, I am greatly indebted to the Leader of the Government and the Honourable Prime Minister, for appointing me as the Assistant Minister which I have wholeheartedly accepted and also prepared to deliver.

Madam Speaker, as a former public servant that faithfully delivered and served our people for 40 years before finally retiring in 2014, my work was very interesting yet mostly challenging. I say this with confidence because I served mainly in the rural parts of the country. I can also confidently claim that the considerable work experience, exposure and the many lessons learnt from these personally gave me a well-grounded view of the realities of certain political leaderships against public perceptions, policy-making and the impact and consequences in as far as the geographical spreads, coupled with social economic spurs for so-called balanced national development, riddled with competing political agendas.

Madam Speaker, but as a public officer, bounded by rules of engagement, I diligently served all that I came into contact with to fulfil my official and public duties as a forester working under the Ministry of Forests or as the Assistant *Roko Tui* for the iTaukei Affairs Board and I have vouched to deliver to the best of my abilities.

Madam Speaker, in 2014 I retired from the Civil Service and returned to my village in Wainunu, Bua to become a fulltime farmer. I was privileged and honoured by the appointment of the Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Honourable Prime Minister to be a member of the Bua Provincial Council and the Bua Provincial Board representing my *Tikina* of Wainunu. Madam Speaker, too much has been said and dreamt about by previous governments on the political slogan of the "Look North Policy", which we residents of Vanua Levu have come to recently witness and see what it really means

through this Government. Significant development activities in the past eight years or so have been implemented in the Northern Division and the progress continues, Madam Speaker.

The new as well as the upgraded development projects implemented in the North, ensuring that the Government remains true to its words, to ensure that we are not left behind, include the following:

- The upgraded Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources' facility to full international standard for accurate information on surveying, navigation, urban planning, establishing maritime boundaries and monitoring of sea level rise;
- The newly-renovated Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, Labasa Office;
- The newly-renovated Labasa Meteorological Services Office;
- Additional water and electricity supply projects;
- New roads, bridges, ports and jetties for better access and opportunities for better, critical services;
- Better quality health care and taking Government services closer to the people, with the construction of new Government stations, officers' quarters, and the list goes on.

Madam Speaker, as the Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, I would like to share my thoughts, arising out of experiencing and closely observing the realities on the ground. There are still gaps in the path of rural development and a lot has to be done with changing people's mindset to accept change for the better.

Madam Speaker, I truly understand the challenges. People's perception of heading towards self-sufficiency plays an integral role in this. The holistic concept of development in any part of the world will collapse if people refuse to appreciate development and take leadership of its sustainability. Throughout the term of this Government, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development has substantially invested in assisting our rural and outer island communities to meet their basic needs, improve living standards and quality of life towards self-sufficiency. Therefore, I envisage the same momentum to continue with our people's support and ownership.

Madam Speaker, rural and maritime development is a key national priority and our Ministry stands firm with the Government's commitment to continue to bridge any development gaps between rural and urban areas. Our Government will ensure that the Integrated Rural Development Framework that it endorsed back in 2009 is fully functional to better coordinate the prioritising of development priorities through a bottom-up approach so that people take full ownership of Government's balanced and sustainable national development goals. In the words of our Honourable Prime Minister, I quote:

“... this Government stands on diversity and therefore, inclusion is critical to maintain dynamism and focus towards a great modern state in which all Fijians are empowered”.

Madam Speaker, according to the 2017 Census Report, Fiji's rural population has decreased by 21,790 compared to 2007. The count shows that 44.1 percent of Fiji's population live in the rural areas which is a decrease of 5.1 percent compared to 2007. Our Ministry remains determined and is firmly committed now to reverse the rural to urban trend by achieving the targets stipulated in the 5 and 20 years' National Development Plan.

Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight the following Government initiatives that the Ministry aims to deliver and promote for now and the future:

- Upscale income-generating projects in the economically-depressed rural areas to support the enhancement of sustainable livelihoods. The Ministry will collaborate closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and other sectors through the integrated road development

framework to ensure that Income-Generating Programmes offered by the line Ministries are equally available for the rural communities.

- Rural development will be prioritised with further improvements in infrastructure and provision of adequate public utilities through the Ministry's Community Access Roads, Footpaths, Footbridges Programme (CARFF) and the Public Sector Investment Programmes (PSIP).
- Agriculture and other sectors will be supported to generate income opportunities for people in the rural and maritime areas.
- The Rural Water Supply Programme will be augmented to provide access to clean water in rural areas to meet the target of 85 percent of rural community having access by 2021. The Ministry will work closely with the Water Authority of Fiji to achieve this target.
- Improved Financial Literacy: The Ministry is part of the National Financial Inclusion Taskforce, chaired by the Reserve Bank of Fiji which aims to improve the livelihood of Fijians through inclusive financial services. The Taskforce comprises of four working groups including financial literacy, inclusive insurance, statistics, inclusive services and products. The Ministry will utilise such forums to improve rural financial services.
- Strengthen the integrated and rural development framework to incorporate inclusive package when undertaking rural infrastructure development that will strengthen inter-agency coordination in facilitating implementation.
- Public awareness to educate rural population on government programmes, social assistance schemes and their responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, the priority areas of Government that I have just mentioned are outlined in the Nation's 5 to 20-Year Development Plan and it is also aligned to the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I note that the following SDGs should be the areas of focus in the terms of programmes mentioned:

- G1 - No Poverty;
- G2 - Zero Hunger;
- G5 - Gender Equality;
- G8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth;
- G14 - Life Below Water;
- G15 - Life on Land;
- G16 - Peace and Justice; and
- G17 - Partnerships for the goals.

Madam Speaker, I wish to echo the words of His Excellency the President, in his Opening Address where he recapped about the pace of new development by the Government in the most rural and remote regions of the country. I concur with his statement, and I quote: "... the pace of that development must be maintained, or even, increased ..."

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is determined to expand access to essential services to our rural and remote population and strive to increase the pace of rural development. Our plans to achieve these are reflected in our strategic plan that will be launched in the near future.

Madam Speaker, I believe that we need to work together with the private sector, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to further boost development in the rural and maritime areas. I believe, Government will continue to put in place frameworks and policies to further incentivise quality investment and encourage development partners to commit resources for economic growth, resilience and sustainability.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned earlier, we will ensure that adequate and effective public awareness is conducted in communities through appropriate and effective mediums of communicating Government information so that the people are able to make informed decisions and meaningful choices for a better quality of life. Gender equality in Government's development priorities and disability inclusiveness will be mainstreamed across all rural programmes to uphold the Government's aim of leaving no one behind. This Government will leave no one behind.

Vinaka Vakalevu, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now suspend proceedings as we adjourn for refreshment and we will return at 5 minutes past 11.00.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.36 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.08 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you may be seated.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, a Point of order!

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order and ask you to make a ruling on it now or later. It is in relation to Standing Order 124(5) on your powers.

On 28th November, 2018, we were informed that the Members of the Standing Committee would be seven. That was resolved, minuted and confirmed, but today, Madam Speaker, you are saying that there will be five. So I seek a ruling whether the Standing Committee can overrule you, overrule the Parliament on that. My point is that, if seven is confirmed, they can be told to go with it, seven is the number. Can I have a ruling on that, Madam Speaker?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The ruling was made and it was a mistake put on my speaking order to announce that ruling when it should not have been, because although the issue was approved verbally, according to the Standing Orders, the Speaker cannot approve further change with the Standing Committee Members, but it has to be with the approval of the Business Committee. This is why we had to put it back to the Business Committee, not only that, the background for that is, we looked at the financial cost of the increase, given that the budget had already been approved for this year, we would not have been able to accommodate the increase in numbers. This is why we went back to the Business Committee and the Business Committee made the ruling that, yes, we will have the five Members and then two alternate Members. That was the reason for the change that we made. Thank you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, before we proceed to the next speaker on the Batting Order, I wish to inform Honourable Members that Standing Order 23 provides that Parliament sits on Friday from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Honourable Members will note that we have several business on today's Order Paper which we need to complete. In this regard, I am allowing the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move the procedural suspension motion without notice, pursuant to Standing Order 6(2), as I consider it necessary for the proper conduct of the business of Parliament.

I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move that under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Order 23, be suspended so as to allow Parliament to sit beyond 12.30 p.m. to complete all business items as listed in today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this was raised and, of course, agreed as well during the meeting of the Business Committee. We have already set up the various Committees, Madam Speaker, and we also have Bills that need to be revised as this Parliament is convened under its new term and therefore there are a number of Bills that will need to again go through the Committee stages so that the process can be completed and this is why, Madam Speaker, we are seeking the support from the House if we can sit beyond 12.30 p.m., particularly for the Consideration of Bills and, of course, after the resumption of the debate on the motion moved by the Honourable Prime Minister, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is before the House for debate and I invite input, if any. There being no input, the Leader of the Government in Parliament, would you like to explain further on your motion?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I have no further comments but to thank the Honourable Members of the Honourable House for their support.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

The question is:

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23 be suspended so as to allow Parliament to sit beyond 12.30 p.m., to complete all business items as listed in today's Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now proceed from where we have left off and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji: *Bula vinaka* and a very good morning.

Madam Speaker, firstly, I would like to join my colleagues in congratulating you on your appointment as the Speaker of this august House and for being the first lady to hold such an honourable position for a second term. I would also like to congratulate all Honourable Members of Parliament for being successful on getting elected to this Chamber. Also, I congratulate the triumphant Honourable Prime Minister for polling the highest number of votes and leading the FijiFirst Party to victory.

The Opposition seems to be obsessed with the percentage of votes FijiFirst received. However, let me remind them that 50.02 percent represents a much higher number than 39.85 percent which SODELPA got and a mere 7.38 percent which the National Federation Party (NFP) got. Even if they are combined, they still do not come close to 50 percent. Our Honourable Prime Minister had more than twice the number of votes to the Leader of Opposition. That shows the difference of popularity between our leader and your leader. The professors on the other side should do their maths and learn to live with the results of the Elections.

Madam Speaker, the difference between the two leaders is clear. When our leader walks on the streets, our people hug him, they take pictures with him, they even kiss him. But when the Leader of the Opposition walks on the streets, people fear him, they look at him with suspicion. That is reflected in the number of votes each of them received and that is the difference between Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka and Rear Admiral Voreqe Bainimarama. So much has been said about the majority in victory, but a victory is a victory, no matter which way you look at it.

The Opposition would do well to heed the adage of Christopher Earle, advising us to be humble in victory and gracious in defeat. Let us show respect where it is due and focus on admiring how well your opponent played rather than your defeat. The Elections is over, Fijians have spoken loud and clear, for FijiFirst to continue governing this country for the next four years. Let us move on.

Madam Speaker, I also rise to commend and thank His Excellency the President, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote for his Parliamentary Opening Address whereby he highlighted Government's continued progress and the nation's stability guaranteed by our Constitution. This has been the basis of our economic prosperity, nine years of straight economic growth which is the longest experience for this nation. This Government has delivered and will continue to deliver the best services to the people of Fiji.

Honourable Professor Biman Prasad yesterday told us to forget about 1987 and 2000. Let me remind him the importance of learning from one's history for those who do not learn from their history are condemned to repeat it.

His Excellency, in his Address, reminded us that Fiji's journey to achieving genuine democracy has not been steady nor has it been unrelenting, and I quote:

“Only recently have we been freed from the cycle of unrest, political instability and destruction of racial vilification that plagued our nation for decades where threats were made against our people, violence was wildered as a tool of oppression and some Fijians were made to feel like strangers in their rightful home. Those traumatic and destructive events in our past can never be repeated but they must never be forgotten because we risk repeating our history should we ever make a fatal mistake of moving forward while disregarding the lessons of our past.

The basis of the *coups* of 1987 and 2000 can be boiled down to the same blatant, harmful and indefensible lie that Fiji and the Fijian people are somehow stronger divided when we are united. That lie was imposed by our people through acts of brute force and violence, accompanied by a political culture of fear, mistrust and communal antagonism.

That poisons the minds of Fijians for generations, needlessly pitying them against their countrymen and women and doing untold damage to the fabric of our national life and we suffer the consequences of those acts and the ills they brought down upon us to this very day.”

I wonder then whether the Opposition has learnt anything from our history since they continued a barrage of lies in their Elections campaign. Some went around saying that the island of Kadavu was sold to China because we did not pay our debts owed to China. Some spoke about a Muslim takeover or about guns hidden in mosques. Some went campaigning that the red coloured flags had a special significance for Hindus, and will be changed to green which colour is associated with Islam. Some said that of the 20 cents plastic levy, 10 cents will go the Prime Minister and 10 cents will go to the Attorney-General. Some even came up with the preposterous idea that the Chinese will take over hospitals and inject poison in us before killing all of us and taking over Fiji.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, some voters did fall for these lies and voted for these parties but not all Fijians can be fooled easily. I repeat, not all Fijians can be fooled easily, and that the fact was demonstrated in the Elections where FijiFirst won by a majority and formed Government.

Fake news and fear-mongering may win you some extra seats but it is not going to win you a place in history, neither will the false promise of reducing the price of beer, lamb chops and firecrackers will win you Elections. The National Federation Party (NFP) being the oldest political party of over 50 years old has never formed government and that speaks volumes about it. They call themselves “legendary”, well, that is some kind of a legend that this party will soon become history.

Madam Speaker, history reserves special seats for leaders such as Frank Bainimarama who has the guts to embrace the truth even when faced with stiff opposition.

Madam Speaker, I am not very old but I have lived through many facets of Fijian politics. My interest in politics grew from a tender age when I just started primary school in Nabouwalu, Bua. My classmates at that time were from all ethnic groups including Ajay, Sanjay, Ravi Dhan, Mitieli and Iliesa, we were in Class 1 then.

That year, in May 1987, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka as he was then, executed Fiji's first *coup*. It was something new for Fiji, Madam Speaker. Some people could not even pronounce the word “*coup*”. Nabouwalu, being a remote location and housing a military base, saw some unspeakable atrocities.

I, as a child, Madam Speaker, witnessed a particular man of a particular race being made to run up and down a steep slope with a vehicle tyre around his neck while being whipped by the Army just because he broke the Sunday law by driving his car, attempting to take his wife to hospital.

I saw in another case in Labasa where a particular man of a particular race was stripped naked by the Army and dipped into a toilet pit just because he held a meeting and spoke against the military rule of that time - shameful.

Madam Speaker, 1987 certainly was not a bloodless coup. It stripped people, not only of their clothes but their rights and dignity. The dark days of the 1987 *coups* and Sunday ban, the 1990 Constitution and racial discrimination which followed, still remain fresh in my mind.

I was in University attaining my Law Degree when the *coup* of May 2000 and the mutiny of November 2000 took place.

That day, I had dreamt a saviour will come and rescue this nation from the atrocities of that time.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- That saviour came in 2006 in the form of Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. I had pledged that day that I will render all support to that leader who saved Fiji ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- ... and here I am as part of his Government.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, if you think that interjections are getting louder than your voice, you may stop, and then continue when your voice can be clearly heard.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- I will repeat, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am allowing you to speak in some cases because you have got a very clear voice and I am able to hear you, however some of the interjections are just getting a bit too loud and that could affect your contributions.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I was in University attaining my Law Degree when the *coup* of May 2000 and the mutiny of November 2000 took place. That day, I had dreamt a saviour will come and rescue this nation from the atrocities at that time. That saviour came in 2006 in the form of our Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama. I had pledged that day that I will render all support to that leader who saved Fiji and here I am as part of this Government.

I was first elected as Member of Parliament in 2014 and was given the opportunity to serve the Prime Minister as the Government Whip, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and as Fiji's Parliamentary representative to the ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

I am grateful to the Prime Minister for showing immense confidence in me by appointing me as his Minister responsible for Lands and Mineral Resources. I am proud to be the youngest Cabinet Minister in the current line-up.

From a toddler in Nabouwalu in 1987, to becoming a lawyer in 2004, to being sworn in as a Member of Parliament in 2014 and to becoming a Cabinet Minister in 2018, it has been a long journey even at my age. I have pledged to the Prime Minister and to the nation that I will do my utmost best in fulfilling my duties to the people, Madam Speaker.

In enhancing legislation to further strengthen access to justice and equality, the FijiFirst Government stands in solidarity in upholding and implementing the Fijian Constitution to serve the best interest of Fijians, where the benefits of progress includes everyone. The Government has put in place strategic and concrete legislations to oversee the development, safety and secure operations of the country such as:

- The Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2018;
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018;
- Online Safety Act 2018;
- Information Act 2018;
- Income Tax (Budget Amendment) Act 2018;
- Public Hospitals and Dispensaries (Budget Amendment) Act 2018;
- Fair Share of Mineral Royalties Act 2018; and
- Other relevant legislations.

In addition, the Ministry is reviewing core legislations and policies to better guide our operations. These are intended to ensure the better management of state natural resources that we administer for the benefit of all stakeholders and the protection of the environment. Therefore, the amendments to these policies will need to have extensive consultations with all parties involved to include all interests, creating a win-win situation.

Madam Speaker, we, as leaders (and I see all of us in this Parliament as leaders), need to be path finders, so that we can accelerate the change needed to improve outcomes of our near future. We all know it is a time of great chances, I think that really needs no further explanation. Those changes lie very strongly in technology, human strengths and capabilities. They change not only the way we live, function, interact with each other but, more importantly, with globalisation the way we transact, and certainly in our context of customer service system, the way in which government services are delivered and received, perpetuated and, of course, new ways in which it can be ameliorated.

So it is in this context, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is working towards making sure that the customer service system remains progressive, contemporary, and keeps pace and also keep ahead of new ways in which excellent service delivery can be accomplished.

My Ministry is looking into:

- making our offices more accessible to the public;
- implementing concrete measures in order to streamline systems and processes;
- enhancing our Customer Services by placing dedicated staff who will attend to grievances across our offices;
- enhance the Helpdesk and Helpline Systems to allow the clients to lodge their complaints online;
- venturing into further joint collaborations with relevant stakeholders, such as the Register of Titles (ROT) to fast-track lease registrations and approves survey plans with the Department of Town and Country Planning; and
- creating other new initiatives and put in place procedures and policies to deal with State land and mineral matters, and work towards achieving them.

At this juncture, I would like to advise people with State land-related issues not to hesitate to visit our offices.

The Ministry will be implementing proactive measures to improve turnaround times in achieving its major deliverables in the most effective and efficient manner. This will be achieved through:

- continuous implementation of Business Re-engineering Process;
- soliciting feedback from our clients; and

- improving quality services through the use of collaboration tools within the Ministry and with other relevant Government agencies.

With the budget allocation of \$37.5 million, \$14.3 million is dedicated to the Ministry's Capital Projects and these are mainly:

- Groundwater Assessment for Development: Large Islands - \$2 million;
- Development of *iTaukei* Land - \$2 million;
- Groundwater Assessment and Development: Small Islands - \$760,000;
- Upgrade of the Geodetic Datum - \$1.483 million;
- Development of State Land - \$1.42 million; and
- Purchase of Groundwater Drill Rigs - \$3 million.

The Ministry has taken a direct approach to the implementation of the Fiji's Constitution Section 36(1), the Right to clean and safe water, which is in-line with the National Development Plan (NDP) of the "Provision of sustainable and safe groundwater sources".

As a key Government priority, the Ministry has been allocated a total of \$5.76 million to achieve this in three different major capital projects, namely:

- Purchase of Drill Rig (\$3 million);
- Groundwater Assessment - Large Islands (\$2 million); and
- Groundwater Assessment - Small Islands (\$760,000).

The Ministry, through the Purchase of Drill Rig hereby enhances groundwater development by replacing current obsolete drilling machines and improving efficiency to cater for the commercial and public demand that the Ministry under the Mineral Resources Department faces.

Madam Speaker, those are some of the highlights from my Ministry.

Some Honourable Members of the Opposition are still resorting to lies in furthering their agenda. I would like to respond to Honourable Kuridrani's statement against the Ministry, delivered yesterday. He had mentioned that the Ministry had issued a licence for the use of their *i qoliqoli* without the landowners' consultation and consent, there was no EIA conducted and no plans to confirm the *i qoliqoli* boundary.

I would like to assure this august House that no such licence or lease for the use of *i qoliqoli* has been approved by the Ministry of Lands. In fact, the work is still in progress.

On the claim of no consultation, in fact, there had been numerous consultations done with the *Vanua Vusu* on 12th September, 2016 and on 27th of July, 2017. In fact, the meeting held on 27th July, 2017 at 12.00 p.m. was held at the Namatakula Village Community Hall, which is Honourable Kuridrani's Village. The meeting records indicated that Honourable Kuridrani was present in that meeting, in his capacity as an advisor of the *Yavusa Vusu*.

On the EIA, Honourable Kuridrani is correct that no EIA has been done, but this is because the foreshore leasing process is in progress. For the demarcation of the *i qoliqoli* boundary, the work is still in progress. As to the claim of compensation of \$20,000 which, in fact, is \$19,828.25, it is the Fisheries Year 1 compensation figure.

We acknowledge the Maiden Speech by the Honourable Member but Honourable Kuridrani should do the honourable thing and stop misleading this House. In fact, he should apologise for his incorrect statement.

In addition, Madam Speaker, our Government does not rob the landowners of their resources like some previous Governments. We, for the first time, are paying 80 percent royalties to the landowners for their minerals. Some of the examples are that, to date, we have paid out a total of \$1.38 million in the form of mineral royalty payments as follows:

- Vatikoula Goldmine landowners - \$731,600.72;
- *Mataqali* Nasomo (which is a settlement in Vatikoula) - \$62,600.64;
- *Mataqali* Serau - \$40,964.82;
- *Mataqali* Naita - \$12,471.93 and
- *Mataqali* Nawaicobo - \$541,358.59.

Those are the *mataqali* for the Vatikoula Goldmines, and the Bauxite Mines in Dreketi, Macuata and Nawailevu Bauxite Mine in Bua.

A lot has been said about the lack of protection of the *i Taukei* land from the Opposition, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, the protection of *i Taukei* land from permanent alienation is well protected under the provisions of the 2013 Constitution. His Excellency the President stated in his Address that not one square centimetre of *i Taukei* land has been lost under the Bainimarama-led Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Listen to this one.

We support the statement, and in fact, the *i Taukei* landowners have gained land through the reversion of State Schedule A Land and State Schedule B Land to the *i Taukei* land. The *i Taukei* landowners have gained a total of 428 leases which equates to 3523.29 hectares of land. That was previously State Land A and State Land B.

There will be more land gained by the *i Taukei* landowners as the work is still continuing with another 2,179 leases to be transferred as the Ministry continues to complete this process in the financial year ahead.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka*.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The Ministry hopes to achieve all the obligatory changes within a practical timeframe.

Madam Speaker, I have highlighted some of the work of my Ministry.

I will now, at this juncture, must acknowledge my friends and family who had helped me during the Elections: First and foremost, my parents: my mother, Mrs. Premila Sudhakar, who went out campaigning for me even at her ripe age; my father, the late Mr. Chandra Sudhakar, who passed away about this time a year ago and I am sure he must be proud of me today smiling down from heaven; my sister, Deveena Sudhakar-Herman; brother-in-law, Anselm Herman; and sister-in-law, Angeline Herman.

While some Honourable Members of the Opposition were busy playing the race and religion cards, my team which included people of various backgrounds, were helping me in my journey, and some of those friends are:

- Mr. Hazrat Ali (Babban) of Rakiraki, Mr. Pandit Rakesh Sharma, Mr. Mohammed Aziz, Mr. Riaz, Mr. Shameem, the former Member of Parliament in FijiFirst and my former Deputy Chairman in the Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Mohammed Mursalin Abe Dean and his family who managed my campaign;
- Mr. Sitiveni and Mili from Veisaru Tui Mala from Sabeto, Mr. Seru from Saunaka, my neighbours: Nemani Bainivalu and Aporosa Bainivalu from Veisaru;
- Mr. Chetan Raniga from Lautoka, Mr. Suresh Gita Prasad from Koronubu in Ba, Mohammed Aiyub, Sanjit from Tavarau, Sunny Narayan from Sigatoka, Arvind Mestry, Ravin of Olosara, DJ Shivneel, Master Shiu Dayal and Family from Siberia, Labasa, Dr. Ishaq from Savusavu, Jainendra Singh of Veisaru, Ms. Preetika Prasad and Ms. Sangeeta Chand, Sunil from Veisaru and Nitesh Singh from Nasau;
- My lawyer friends: Shailend Krishna, Sidhart Nandan, Samuel Ram, Pravin Dayal from Wailoku; Ajay Sharma (we call him "Hardy" in Ba), Anil Singh (the Director of Neon Signs of Ba), Mr. Daniel Ram, Sheik Nabi and Faiyaz Ali Neta;
- My Family: Anil Pratap and Kamal Pratap of Koronubu, Ba and their children: Arti, Arpana and Ashrit and also Amit and Pratikshna; and
- Arun and Saroj Kumar; my cousin, Ritesh Sachindra Kumar, Ashok and Shubhag, Balgovind and Rohitash and Preeti Balgovind; Brian and Nirmala Singh, Vinesh Kumar Babba and Meena Kumar.

Madam Speaker, I, once again thank the Honourable Prime Minister and the FijiFirst Party's General Secretary, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, for allowing me to contest the Elections under the FijiFirst banner and for showing immense confidence in me by appointing me as Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources.

With that, I once again congratulate my fellow colleagues and trust that we will all work together hand in hand, in ensuring a better Fiji for all Fijians.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Lynda Tabuya to take the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, families and friends gathered here today, and the people of Fiji joining us through televised broadcast and around the world via *Facebook* live: *Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Faiakse'ea.*

I would like to thank my Heavenly Father and my Saviour Jesus Christ, for without you I am nothing. I congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your re-election, and I wish you well in the next four years in your very important task, to bring balance to this esteemed House.

I congratulate Honourable Veena Bhatnagar for her election as Deputy Speaker. I congratulate all 51 Members of Parliament for a hard-fought campaign and success in making it this far. I acknowledge the hard work and efforts of candidates of all political parties who, though they did not make it this time, will find peace in their stellar efforts to gain those votes that contributed to our achievement in becoming Members of Parliament.

I humbly stand before this House, Madam Speaker, in awe with a deep sense of gratitude in acknowledging the proud history of our beloved nation and the men and women who have shaped it; a history that has been fraught with perils but one whose stories have highlighted the amazing resilience of our people. My life's journey is one such story which I would like to share today.

It begins with my late father, Jone Tabuya, who hails from the small coastal village of Tiliva, Nakasaleka in Kadavu. Though small in numbers, the village houses the district school, as well as the Methodist Church circuit that has seen many children and families call Tiliva "home". It is where my heart will always be and where I was first inspired by our village chief, the late Mr. Konisi Yabaki, who was a Government Minister in the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) Government.

To the *Vanua o Vunimatolu, vua na Turaga na Tunidau ni Tiliva*, the *Mataqali Olorua*, Naicavacava and Solovia, to the Tiliva Development Committee, the Tiliva Rugby Sevens Committee, Tiliva Youth, whom I have worked closely with over the years, who rose time and again after each cyclone and have stood by my side: I would like to say to them - a big *vinaka vakalevu*.

To my mother, Taufu Tabuya, who is sitting here in the gallery and hails from Gasauva, Tawake in Cakaudrove: you are my rock, my best friend and my prayer warrior. Just like the resilience shown by my *vasu* in Gasauva against the devastating effects of climate change that has warranted the relocation of the village to higher grounds, you, mum, have taught me the quiet strength of a woman who builds resilience against the stormy weathers of life, and the wisdom to shut out noise and distractions and to focus on serving others with a clean heart and malice towards none. I honour you, *Na*.

To the *Vanua o Udu, vua na Turaga na Tui Udu*, and to all my *vasu* from Gasauva, I thank you.

Madam Speaker, I grew up in the informal settlement of Wakanisila in Kalabu, under the caring kindness of the *Liuliu ni Yavusa o Matanikorovatu*. I want to acknowledge and thank the *Liuliu ni Yavusa*, Ratu Paula Rawiriwiri, and *Radini Vanua o Kalabu*, Litia Rawiriwiri, and the landowners of this country who have shared their land at close to no cost to enable a huge portion of our people to live on the land in informal settlements.

As a child growing up in Wakanisila, I became a silent witness to the destructive power of poverty. Sharing my grandparents' two bedroom house with 10 children and six adults was far from an ideal childhood but in my neighbourhood, it was the norm.

With no running water or electricity and poor sanitation, I remember those times of hunger, loneliness, contention, trauma, bullying, violence and abuse that is typical of life living in poverty. But through it all, Madam Speaker, my desire to escape the poverty of my youth fuelled my dreams and aspirations until I reached university where again, my parents' inability to pay for my education threatened to derail my plans.

I am thankful that the Government at that time, led by the former Prime Minister and current Opposition Leader, Major-General (Ret'd) Honourable Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, had an affirmative action programme, such as the Fijian Affairs Board Scholarship to enable me to achieve tertiary education. Just as my Indo-Fijian friends were going off on the Public Service Commission (PSC) scholarship, I was awarded a scholarship to study law in Australia.

Honourable Rabuka has been there at each milestone in my life and to that, I am grateful. From being the chief guest, awarding me the dux prize at Adi Cakobau School (ACS), to awarding me a scholarship to study law at Bond University in Australia, to crowning me Miss Hibiscus, to initiating the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA)/People's Democratic Party (PDP) Memorandum of Understanding that brought me here, Honourable Rabuka has been there every step of the way.

I reciprocated his belief in me with my unwavering loyalty to my leader and while during his darkest hour when the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) came for him, I was one of the first people to stand up and say, "Before you lay a finger on him, you have to go through Kadavu first."

Madam Speaker, I share my story because at its core, is a story of how Government policies and education are key to the fight against poverty and how it can impact, not only a poor girl from Wakanisila, but also our beloved country as a whole. The struggles of my childhood are just not my story, but the story of nearly half of our population who live in poverty.

Madam Speaker, fighting poverty is one of the reasons I first ventured into politics in 2014 with the People's Democratic Party. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to its former leader, FTUC General Secretary, Mr. Felix Anthony; to my PDP and FTUC family, Mark Anthony, Vijay Singh, Daniel Urai, Pearl Antonio, Anasa Vocea, Jyoti Sharma, Nilesh Sharma, Dodi and all our union families, thank you for your belief in me and instilling in me the importance of fighting for workers' rights.

Madam Speaker, my involvement with the Trade Union Movement came to national attention when on the 16 of December, 2017, the Airports Terminal Services (ATS) employees were locked out of their work. I still remember feeling shocked at the sight of the employees, still in their uniforms, sitting over the drains at a venue, now affectionately called, the "drain station."

In these workers' eyes, I saw a look of determination, unified in their resolve to see it through to the bitter end, if necessary. This resolve was tested to its limits as the days turned into weeks. Christmas and New Year came and went and their jobs advertised right in front of them. What was amazing to see was the support they received from the nation, from the \$16,000 raised from "My Go Fund Me" page to the over 8,000 people who descended on Nadi to march. It was during these trying times that amazing leaders, shareholders and workers played an integral part in inspiring the fighter in me. I would like to say a big "thank you" to Mrs. Sai Vulawalu, the iron lady of ATS, Manasa Ratuveli, Vili Finau, Emitai Koto and the late Ratu Viliame Naulumatua, and the members of the FASA Union and the ATS Employees Trust.

Madam Speaker, I again highlight my journey because the ATS movement is part of the nearly 9,000 people who voted for me and whose future I feel personally responsible for. Now, Madam Speaker, I had initially drafted my maiden speech to capture this very real anger, to be the voice of workers who are hurt and frustrated. My initial draft was a collection of pointed attacks with my perceived failings of this Government. It was a great speech filled with witty one-liners and back-handed compliments meant to go viral on social media, but as I watched each speaker this week, I could not help but wonder if I am going down the same path of animosity, whether that would best serve the voters that elected me and indeed the nation.

It was actually this morning, Madam Speaker, I re-typed my speech and from 5.00 a.m., I made the decision to put down my guns and extend my hand across the aisle in a genuine attempt to make Fiji the home I have always dreamed it to be.

To this end, I would like to thank His Excellency the President, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote, for his inspiring Opening Address where he called for unity as the basis for true patriotism and, Sir, believe me, when I say, in the interest of the nation, I have heard your call.

Madam Speaker, as a nation, we cannot let our past define us and the mammoth task of leading nearly a million citizens with only 51 of us to lead nearly a million citizens, Madam Speaker, we need to come together as one. Each side of the House holds the mandate of half our population and the healing of our nation can only truly begin when we make a genuine effort to bring these two halves together to make us whole again.

Madam Speaker, as the Opposition spokesperson on Local Government, Housing and Environment, I look forward to working closely with the Minister for Housing and Development, Honourable Premila Kumar.

Fiji continues to struggle with:

- Providing proper housing for our people;
- Informal settlements and squatter settlements grow bigger and bigger every year;
- Poor sanitation, lack of essential services like rubbish collection;
- Poor maintenance of infrastructure and treacherous living conditions is a daily struggle.

I commend the Government on its initiative to formalise leases for informal settlements. That was an initiative that began four years ago and it is still not finalised.

With poor sanitation and unhealthy living conditions, we continue to see an increase in malnutrition, skin diseases, typhoid, dengue fever outbreaks, measles, chicken pox and pneumonia with no rubbish collection services, plastic bags of rubbish are dumped every day in our street corners and rivers, with no solution in sight. This causes blockage of drains and waterways that create flooding in a matter of hours after a heavy downpour. Rubbish dumped in rivers end up in the Rewa Delta and out at sea that immediately threaten our marine life and food supplies. Overgrown trees and shrubbery coupled with weak home structures create real hazards and threat to life and home during strong winds, heavy rain and the normal cyclone season from November to March.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with the Honourable Minister for solutions on affordable strong but low-cost housing for our low to middle income families, which I believe can be achieved through mass production that reduces the cost and building out between the Lami to Deuba corridor, satellite towns, self-sustaining with its own infrastructure and essential services and attracting new business on the same corridor to create employment. This can also contribute to reducing traffic congestion.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with the Honourable Minister to provide affordable housing for our people living with disabilities and the elderly, with proper facilities and specifications to enable our citizens to live equally and with dignity. Improving our city planning to fully incorporate disabled friendly spaces, more ramps, more elevators, more footpaths and more walkways, recreational spaces and transportation, closed captioning on television, Madam Speaker, for the deaf, more Braille services for the blind, better access to medical services, education and financial assistance.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with the Honourable Minister on a solution to providing essential services in the interim to deal with rubbish collection, with something as simple as providing dumpsters at central points for collection once or twice a week. Our commitment to COP 23 must begin literally in our own backyards. Services such as trimming of trees and cleaning of drains in these settlements can be community-based, as part of SME initiatives.

Madam Speaker, as Opposition Assistant Spokesperson to the Honourable Leawere on Labour and Industrial Relations, I look forward to working with the Honourable Minister, Parveen Bala, a former union man himself, to achieve the increase in the minimum wage to \$4 an hour and to help restore faith and trust in the tripartite forum for equal representation of workers on national issues affecting them. I owe my duty to our poor, those who live on \$2.68 an hour or less. How many of us here in this esteemed House actually live on \$100 a week, Madam Speaker? That is the reality for our security guards, our kitchen help, our house help, our nannies and our unskilled workers. To our civil servants, I will do my utmost best to represent you in this esteemed House and look forward to working with Government on issues affecting you.

Madam Speaker, as an Assistant Shadow for the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, I would like to see more women Judges and Magistrates in our Judiciary. On this note, I would like to thank the Head of the Judiciary, who will be retiring very soon, His Lordship the current Chief Justice Anthony Gates. Thank you for your service to Fiji. I also wish to congratulate my fellow women Members of Parliament who continue to shatter the glass ceiling and give hope to achieve more gender equality and gender participation on a national level.

Madam Speaker, I am committed to working together, not just in the spirit of bipartisanship as inspired by His Excellency and my colleagues on this side of the House, but to take it a step further, and that is to work together on issues with real results.

Madam Speaker, I am committed to peace-building and nation-building, and with this spirit, I have a strong foundation to stand on, and that is my family and friends. I wish to acknowledge firstly the father of my children, Rob Semaan, who is sitting here; and my six children, Mercedes, Talei, Zion, Vienna, Ameera and Justice, who are the greatest examples of true love. To my sister, Ane, my brothers Jay, William and Waisale, my Tabuya family, my Balawaviriki family: I love you all.

Madam Speaker, my special acknowledgement to all the 8,795 voters who believed in me. I pledge to you to continue to be worthy of your trust in me. To our people who did not vote for me, I will continue to represent you equally and without prejudice.

I wish to thank sincerely my most hardworking campaign team, my Campaign Manager, Etuate Tuqota, thank you; my generals, Kaulotu, Lupe and Moana; my 518 youth volunteer team, as I told you last night, this is not the end, this is just the beginning of a life long journey and life-changing journey together. Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart. To my bosom buddies, my girls, the ACS Class of 1990 and the wider ACS Old Girls' network, thank you for your love and friendship fostered since high school and continues stronger than ever.

To my think-tank, Barbara Malimali, Fili Vosarogo, Vuli Savou, Sam Vaniqi and Rosemary Drau, thank you for keeping it real. To my dear ladies of Vision Fiji, an NGO that advocates for our children, Gaetane Austin, Shantini Saberi, Marjorie Whippy, Avaneesh Raman and my dear sister, Gazala Akbar; and our children, Saabil, Shad, Aeaza and Ozayr, thank you for sharing my passion to fight for a better future for our children.

To my three Nephites: Eileen Waradi, Eileen Swann and Martha Johansson, I love you, all as well as those generous individuals who supported me near and far, the Tovata SODELPA, USA, the

Liuliu ni Yavusa and *Radini Vanua* of Matanikorovatu in Kalabu and the SODELPA Nasinu Constituency.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I felt disheartened by our Party's loss, yes, in the Elections after a hard-fought race but herein lies the truth. At the end of the day, we are all one team. In the end, it is not FijiFirst, NFP or SODELPA that wins, it is Fiji that needs to win. We need the same national pride and passion that we all cheer for our national rugby sevens team to support all 51 Members of Parliament.

We are patriots of this beloved country, and as patriots, we must make a genuine attempt at putting the interest of the nation above everything. Now, more than ever before, is the time that, we, as a nation must come together as we look forward to our beloved Fiji's 50th Anniversary of Independence. I suggest that we work on our very own national pledge, a pledge of allegiance to the flag of the Republic of Fiji, that when recited, will remind us of our patriotic duties to put our country first before self, and instil in our children and citizens a sense of national pride, unity and destiny.

Madam Speaker, as with any division, it will not be easy to look beyond the hurt and animosity of the past in striving for a brighter tomorrow, but it has to start today. In all our dealings, we must come to the table with no preconceived agenda, an honest and willing heart to listen to the other side. Continuous dialogue and clear channels of communications are essential. Either we heal now as a nation, or we fight and die as individuals.

At the end of the day, I may be naïve and be dismissed as a dreamer and we may fall back to our familiar battlelines and hardened stances, let us focus less on who we fight against, and focus more on who we fight for.

Madam Speaker, we owe it to our voters and the people of Fiji to find real solutions to problems that plague our country now. I firmly believe that together we can build the future we all want.

Madam Speaker, I wish you, the Members of Parliament, our families and friends who are here and the whole of Fiji, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and God bless Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- *Vinaka*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite Honourable Pio Tikoduadua to take the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, good afternoon. It is good to be back in this august House after some three and a half years, and personally, it is a mighty relief that I am sitting here and not sitting as Leader of Government like my good friend, something that I had to painfully endure for nine months until May 2015.

Madam Speaker, I join other Honourable Members in thanking His Excellency for his most gracious Address to this House when he opened the new sitting of Parliament on Monday, 26th November, 2018. While many have rightly stated that His Excellency was ungraciously compelled to read a FijiFirst campaign speech, His Excellency is made of far sterner stuff that most Fijians do not know of. I can vouch for this as I have known him for the last 30 years since 1988 when I joined the Republic of Fiji Military Forces as an Officer Cadet. Like His Excellency, I have known three other Honourable Members of this House for the last 30 years: the Honourable Prime Minister as the Commander of the Fiji Navy back then; my good friend the Honourable Minister for Defence who was

an Officer Cadet like me in the same school; and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka who was our Commander.

Unfortunately, the words that I heard him speak were not the type of words that I know he would speak. His Excellency, during his military days, stood for the people, Madam Speaker, stood for peace, building bridges, mending fences and standing up for principles. That came out quite distinctly during his term as Chief of Staff, Deputy Commander of RFMF, and later as Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Forces In Lebanon (UNIFIL).

I am saddened, Madam Speaker, that His Excellency found it fit to read that speech as I heard it, because it is a stark contrast of what I know his person to be. I hope to see in the next four years of the term of this Parliament that His Excellency would demonstrate more of the traits and characteristics that bind us that I once knew him for.

Of course, yesterday, Madam Speaker, you all heard from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition of the bravery and gallantry of His Excellency while serving our nation on peacekeeping missions. I am sure that the camaraderie, leadership and bravery displayed by His Excellency during his time as a decorated army officer, will come to the forefront in his role as a symbol of unity for our nation.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election as Head of Parliament for the next four years, and I take this time personally to congratulate also, Colonel Luveni, my good friend. Your role as Speaker has become even more important, Madam Speaker, in the last four years due to the numerical composition of Parliament's opposing sides with Government having a wafer-thin majority of only three seats having just got to the tape is likely above 50 percent.

Like your erstwhile predecessors, Madam Speaker, I believe you have a chance to make history, and for all the right reasons in being the authoritative but calm and rationale voice of reason. This is critically important given the bitter and acrimonious nature of debate hurling fire and brimstone from side to side of this House, just like business as usual in the last four years.

I only hope that the Government will be magnanimous and start talking to us, instead of talking at us because talking at us will not bring equality, dignity and justice to all our people; talking at us will not result in lasting social, economic and political advancement. Above all, talking at us will cause irreparable damage to our very delicate race relations right now, Madam Speaker, in our beloved Fiji.

Madam Speaker, it is easy to differentiate truth from lies, and we were bombarded with gutter-level lies by FijiFirst and its Leader, during campaign resulting in the polarisation of the nation like never before.

The nation has been divided right down the middle if we look at this House, Madam Speaker, instead of promoting equality, common and equal citizenry. This imposed Constitution and its framers have perpetuated ethnic division through their racial bigotry, demonisation of SODELPA and its Leader, preaching fear, attacking the NFP and its leaders, and handing out freebies. Tragically, and most fortunately, this Parliament resembles the true portrait of our nation, and the blame for this must rest squarely on the Government and its leadership.

The FijiFirst Leader has set the ball rolling of statements that were full of lies and racial bigotry during his Party's fun day in Nausori on 6th October. This was the launching pad of what would be a case of repeating lies *ad-nauseam* throughout the country, including through print media, television and radio advertising. It is no use repeating them here, Madam Speaker, but the end result is this tragic portrait of Parliament Precinct, racially compartmentalised. The onus is on all of us to ensure that this

compartmentalisation does not filter down to our people. We must work hard to stop that because we know the facts of these the world over, when people fan the flames of racism could bring catastrophic results.

Since Tuesday, that Election campaign was brought to Parliament again. For the past three days, we have been hearing the Government side accusing the Opposition and its supporters of promoting racial bigotry. It is a case, Madam Speaker, of a pot calling the kettle "black". Madam Speaker, while social media has been mentioned, there is no mention of fake profiles and trolls who are for all intents and purposes, I believe, FijiFirst supporters. There has been no mention of condemnation of Facebook or fake Facebook pages with logos of Fiji One News or Fijivillage.com, accusing SODELPA and NFP of forming a coalition or SODELPA removing Diwali as a public holiday. Surely, we are not living on an animal farm here, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday, we heard Government interjections of *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) when the Honourable Leader of NFP was speaking. VHP has been described as an extremist organisation by the Honourable Attorney-General. But I would like him to furnish the evidence that VHP Fiji is an extremist religious organisation? For argument's sake, if it is

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- ... the evidence for that?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You're still a Trustee.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I was coming to that but I am glad that you've pointed it out.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Prove that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We have evidence, you have not resigned.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Where is the proof?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- For argument's sake, Madam Speaker, if it is, then why did the learned and Honourable Attorney-General say this in 2014 when VHP executives openly campaigned and provided financial support for FijiFirst?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Where is the proof?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- If you want the prove I can give it to you, Bala. I can give it to you, Bro, but that is not my point.

May I also add, Madam Speaker, what is a trustee of an extremist organisation, the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar, doing on Government benches as a Minister?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- A Point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of order.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The Honourable Member has just stated that I am a trustee of VHP, it is an incorrect statement. I am not, I am standing by it, he should withdraw it, even his Leader has just spoken about that. I categorically state that I am not a Trustee of VHP and he should withdraw that statement.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Have you resigned?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- No, he made a comment that I am a trustee. Do not twist the facts.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Have you resigned?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- You prove it first. It is an allegation.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, please, withdraw that statement. It has been confirmed that it is incorrect.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A Point of order. The point of order cannot be allowed because he is referring to

HON. SPEAKER.- Excuse me?

HON. MEMBER.- What is your point of order?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The Point of order cannot be allowed because points of order are just for procedures, not on the contents of the speech. I think for your ruling, Madam Speaker

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you do not have a point of order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Standing Order 81, if he wants to correct a misrepresentation, he has to wait after the Honourable Speaker.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- No.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is what Standing Order 81 says, you have to wait, please, when he finishes then you can stand up and correct any misrepresentation. Do not stand up just like this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, points of order can be raised at any time, and it takes precedence.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tikoduadua, could you withdraw the statement that you have just made?

HON. MEMBER.- Then why are you saying that you're wrong?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw it, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- I was talking to the Honourable Tikoduadua.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, anyway

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, my intention was not to mention it in the House but I was informed as such, and upon taking your instructions, I withdraw that statement.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I have returned to this House after three and a half years of leaving and recovering in my home village of Delasui. I had resigned from this House giving health and my personal wellbeing as the reasons for doing so.

Madam Speaker, I treasure every day I live because managing cancer, high blood pressure and a blocked artery is not a matter of beauty but of courage, the kind of courage that requires the patience to endure the challenges of everyday life. I am living with this condition, Madam Speaker, however I will not allow it to impede my passion for serving my country. But, Madam Speaker, 18 months ago, I revealed that there were more reasons than just my health that cost me to leave the FijiFirst Party.

Essentially, Madam Speaker, it boiled down to my lack of confidence in the leadership of Honourable Josia Voreqe Bainimarama, primarily my differing opinion to the Honourable Prime Minister about the methods of realising his vision for Fiji, a vision that I inherit with him from the Year 2000, Madam Speaker.

During my maiden speech in 2014, I said one thing that I still remember quite distinctly, Madam Speaker, it was that I shared the vision of the Honourable Prime Minister that the Republic of Fiji Military Forces should return Fiji to the Government that was voted by the people. This was a vision of a prosperous, united and a democratic Fiji, a Fiji of *Talanoa*, consultation and an appreciation of each other's differences.

Madam Speaker, while I still share that vision, it is of great concern to me that the Prime Minister has shifted in his methods of achieving that vision.

As I had alluded to earlier, he set the ball rolling by hurling racial bigotry and false accusation at NFP and malicious claims about the NFP and youth leaders ducking for cover and running in the cane fields. It is like we owe our existence to him, Madam Speaker, and this is not the Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama that I know for many, many years (30 years), a leader proclaiming Election campaign to be a battle of ideas, changes tune three months later and spews racist venoms.

I wonder, Madam Speaker, why the Honourable Prime Minister did an about-turn. Yes, for all intents and purposes, has the Honourable Prime Minister shirked collective responsibility in favour of making decision solely or together with a few of his loyalists? Yes, again, Madam Speaker!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Oh!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Two men rule is what Fiji will have to endure for the next four years, unless the Court of Disputed Returns has something else to say. Two men, Madam Speaker, who, in my firm and unequivocal view, are behaving like the political judge, jury and executioner, and I can say this with absolute authority, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, unknown to the people of Fiji, even to FijiFirst Party supporters, members, financiers or even its Members of Parliament, only three people under the Party's Constitution can become the party leader. They are the founder President, the founder Leader and the founder General Secretary.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Oh!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Unless things have changed, of course, in the unlikeliest of events, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- The founder President is out because that is you, Madam Speaker.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Some of them haven't even seen her.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- It is left with just two: the Honourable Prime Minister and his right-hand, the Honourable Attorney-General. Only three are founding members of FijiFirst and only they and they alone can become leaders.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- No one has any say. There is no vote taken in an AGM, simply, Madam Speaker, dictatorship, I believe, at its worst.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Now that you have been out as foundation member for the last four years, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General will have to out-vote each other in the event there is a contest, even dictatorship can sometimes look ridiculous, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- A most undemocratic Constitution as far as I am concerned that has been accepted by the Registrar of Political Parties' indirect contravention of the Code of Conduct of Political Parties and the Political Parties Decree or Act, and now the same dictatorship is trying to entrench itself upon the people of Fiji through another imposed law - the 2013 Constitution. This is a stark contrast to the principles of democracy that give power to the people. The power now is vested in the Constitution - a Constitution in which the people did not have a voice in its making or at least majority of them.

There are many other things that the Constitution endorses that I do not agree with or necessarily agree with but the Prime Minister is not willing to change it, Madam Speaker, and disagreement with the Constitution despite taking oath to uphold it does not mean that one cannot aspire to try and change it.

Madam Speaker, 27 Indo-Fijian Members of Parliament (MPs), led by the National Federation Party (NFP) leader, Honourable Justice Jai Ram Reddy, 37 indigenous Fijian MPs, five General Electors MPs and one Rotuman MP, twice took an oath to uphold the 1990 Constitution. Indo-Fijian MPs, particularly from NFP, were elected after solely campaigning to seek changes to the Constitution, for them this was paramount.

The NFP's MPs (20) after the snap Elections of 1994, led by Honourable Jai Ram Reddy, worked together with the Honourable Prime Minister Rabuka to get the racist 1990 Constitution changed. It was an historic and unanimous decision of the House of Representatives, the Senate and the

Great Council of Chiefs. Impossible was nothing to them because each side from their own perspective of change and resisting change respectively, Madam Speaker, came to the middle ground, purely for national interest.

The oppressor and the oppressed came to the same table, just as Nelson Mandela did for his people a few decades ago, and the Indo-Fijian MPs had sworn an oath under the very same Constitution that they had wanted to change. Indigenous Fijian MPs took an oath to uphold the supreme law of the land that permanently put them into power so this argument of one being hypocritical by asking for changes to the 2013 Constitution after making an oath to uphold it, is a warped logic, Madam Speaker, and the Honourable Attorney-General knows this too well but as usual, I believe he is just being overly dramatic about it.

Madam Speaker, returning to the 2013 Constitution specifically, I would like to speak about the role of the military under Section 131(2). The Commander, I believe, his senior officers, former Military commanders, Defence analysts and strategists would agree with me that an institution like the RFMF today does not have the capability, the ability and the capacity to objectively meet and deliver effectively the wellbeing of the Fijian people. Being able to provide for the wellbeing of the people is much more than security and derogation of power, Madam Speaker. It is about a home, a loving family, security from climate change, fighting poverty and the pursuit of happiness. This is something that the Military cannot realistically do, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I know why the provision of the wellbeing of the people is there, that is to provide a net that would make as a reasonable excuse for military intervention. I refer specifically to the use of military personnel to stop the installation of Ratu Epenisa as the *Vunivalu*.

Madam Speaker, the next thing I would like to discuss with the Constitution is the perception of the people as to the unfairness and bias of various State institutions such as the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), FICAC, the Police and the Military. The people view them as tools of subversion. I can only advise that it is important that state institutions not only need to be independent, they must also be seen to be so. Currently the perception is that they seem to always lean on the side of Government when it comes to controversial issues.

Madam Speaker, I would like to speak about our equality, more so our inequalities under the Constitution. I would be the first person to stand for equality, however, I accept that we are not all the same. The dignity of the human person dictates that we must not treat people any differently from each other, however, one size does not fill all, yes, we are one, Madam Speaker, but we are also many. To view equality from the simplistic approach of everyone getting the same, could defeat the very intention of pursuing our equality.

Madam Speaker, finally I would like to share with the House my experience of admission in the hospital. I am saddened to say that the Government has blissfully ignored the continued deteriorating state of our hospitals.

I was, on every occasion of my movement from ward to ward at CWM, required to provide for my own linen and bedding. The furniture, even in the paying ward, were infested with bed bugs and on one occasion, an entire ward of more than a 100 people (both men and women), were forced to only use one toilet and bathroom facility, but the best thing about our health services today, Madam Speaker, is the kindness of its people, in particular, I mention the young Dr. Rabukawaqa, of whom I was well pleased.

Also to the Senior Medial Officer at Korovou, Tailevu and her ancillary staff, Dr. Rabukawaqa: if you were not there, I believe I would not be standing here; thank you so much.

I would like to thank now on this occasion, Madam Speaker, everyone who allowed or through their vote brought me to this House. In particular, I acknowledge a special *vinaka vakalevu* to *Momo Tamai* Kini from Dakuivuna, who was my campaign manager and members of my team, not forgetting my wife, Sereana, and my family who have been my pillar of strength and inspiration. The *vanua* and the people of Tailevu North, Villages of Dakuivuna, Wailotua, Malabi, Navunisole, Nalidi, Soa, Nailega, Vadrakula, *Vanua* o Wainibuka, Namalata, Sawakasa, Dawasamu, Verata, Vugalei and Tai Vugalei, I say: "Thank you, *maleka vakalevu*".

Last, but not the least, my own people in the villages of Korovou in Delasui and everyone else out there in Fiji and abroad that voted for me; to team NFP and our supporters, ably led by our leader: you are part of a legendary 55-year old Party that has survived, and I hope that you will continue these aspirations for the future.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank you and wish Honourable Members of this Parliament and your good family, a very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year. Thank you.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as you have noted, names and titles in the vernacular are permissible in this Chamber. It is only when you are quoting a statement or a speech that you have to use the quote and unquote, I just wanted to clarify that. Thank you.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Members of Government, Members of Opposition and citizens in the gallery: Madam Speaker, firstly I congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the House for the next four years. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, for her appointment. We are happy to see the progress of women in leadership and I congratulate all the women in our new Parliament. To balance matters, it is also good to congratulate all the men who came through.

However, I note with regret that the appointment of Deputy Speaker would have been a good opportunity for a new beginning, whereby the Deputy Speaker is taken up by the Opposition as not only convention but in the spirit of new partnership in order to forge a new beginning as a united Fiji. Unfortunately, this is not how the FijiFirst wishes to proceed. As usual, they follow the ideology of "we are always right and winner takes it all." However, I am still positive that the godly spirits of goodwill and humility will triumph over arrogance.

Today is a very significant day for me as I have achieved my life long objective to serve the people in national leadership. First and foremost, I thank the good Lord Jesus Christ for setting the right path for me to follow. Indeed, it would be difficult to achieve anything meaningful without adherence to the Word of God. Without my wife, Yvonne Tuisawau, I would not have reached this far. I thank her and my five children for their solid support. The Bible verse, *Psalms 127:1*: "A house built without the Lord is a house built in vain" shall always endure, not only at the personal and family level, but definitely at the leadership level and for all of us as a nation which is really one House.

I also thank those who voted for me in Rewa, Nadi and around the country and my campaign managers in Rewa, Beqa and Nadi.

I take this moment to thank sincerely the SODELPA Leader, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka; the Leader of the Opposition in the last Parliament, *na Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi*,

Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa; and *Turaga na Tui Cakau*, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, for their support and leadership. I thank all the hardworking staff and volunteers of SODELPA. We must not forget the hardworking staff of SODELPA such as Peceli Kinivuwai and Pio Tabaiwalu, who guided SODELPA during the difficult years of purely dictatorship in 2006 and onwards.

Madam Speaker, let me go through some key milestones in our history as the Government side of our Parliament never appreciates any or acknowledges the history of our nation. I do not even know whether they know that there is an indigenous people in Fiji, it seems that they are always ignorant of that fact. We are tired of the saying, "No other Government except FijiFirst".

They tried very hard to brainwash the people of Fiji into believing that Fiji was bushland prior to the evil birth of FijiFirst out of the evil 2006 *coup*. They have abolished the Ratu Sukuna Day public holiday, which is a day to remember our statesman and chief, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, whose achievements will never be equal by anyone on the other side of this Honourable House, as far as the *iTaukei ni vanua* are concerned.

Madam Speaker, let us go back into our history, we need to know this in order to understand what we are facing today:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1970 (10th October) | We achieved our Independence through Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, where the Instruments of independence by His Royal Highness Prince Charles were accepted. |
| 1972 | Fiji's first General Elections under the 1970 Constitution, I note here in the 1970s where the leaders of NFP, Honourable A.D. Patel and Honourable S.M. Koya had embraced the idea of peaceful co-existence and political partnerships by initiating the participation of chiefs in the NFP, namely <i>na Turaga Na Tui Cakau</i> , the Honourable Ratu Glanville Lalabalavu, father of Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu; the Honourable Ratu Mosese Tuisawau, my late father; the Honourable Ratu Julian Toganivalu; and the Honourable Ratu Soso Katonivere, <i>Turaga Na Tui Macuata</i> . |
| 1987 (May) | There was a <i>coup</i> by our leader. |
| 1987 (October) | There was a second <i>coup</i> and Fiji was declared a Republic. |
| 1990 | There was a new Constitution enshrining ethnic Fijian dominance. |
| 1992 | Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka became the Prime Minister, following the General Elections and importantly following that, the Constitution Review Commission was appointed throughout to 1997, where extensive consultations were done throughout Fiji, including right down to the village level. The new Constitution became law in 1997 and Fiji was re-admitted into the Commonwealth. |
| 1999 | Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry became Prime Minister after the Fiji Labour Party emerged from the General Elections with enough seats to rule on its own. |
| 2000 (May) | Rebels took over Parliament under George Speight and the Military abrogated the 1997 Constitution and imposed Martial Law. |

- 2000 (July) Chaudhry and hostages released, the Great Council of Chiefs appointed Ratu Josaia Iloilovatu Uluivuda. Another milestone in that year, one Chandrika Prasad challenged the actions of the Military and the High Court of Fiji upheld that the 1997 Constitution was still the Constitution of Fiji, but the Fiji Court of Appeal also upheld the decision. Basically, the decision was that no Constitution can be changed unless through the provisions within that Constitution, and that is still true today.
- 2001 Prime Minister Qarase was elected.
- 2003 The Supreme Court ruled that Prime Minister Qarase must include Members of the Opposition in his Cabinet under the 1997 Constitution.
- 2005 (July) The Military Chief warned that he would remove government.
- 2006 (Oct., Nov.) Tensions rose between Prime Minister Qarase and the Military Chief Bainimarama who threatened to oust the government after it tried and failed to replace him. Mr. Qarase goes into hiding as the crisis escalated. Mr. Bainimarama said in a televised address that he had taken the executive powers in December 2006 and dismissed Qarase.
- 2006 (December) Commonwealth suspended Fiji because of the *coup*.
- 2007 (April) Bainimarama sacked the Great Council of Chiefs and suspended all future meetings, after the chiefs refused to endorse his Government and nomination for Vice-President, despite the reasons he is professing today.
- 2008 (July) Bainimarama postponed Elections promise for early 2008, 2009 on the grounds that the Electoral Reforms could not be completed on time.
- 2009 (April) Another Appeal Court ruled that the Military regime was illegally appointed after 2006, this was in April 2009, and said that the Caretaker Prime Minister should call for Elections to restore democracy.
- President Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda repealed the Constitution, appointed himself as Head of State and set the 2014 deadline. He re-appointed Prime Minister Qarase, and Qarase was Prime Minister. Martial law was imposed, Bainimarama unveiled plans for a new Constitution by 2013 ahead of Elections in 2014. He said that under the proposed changes, ethnic-based system in the 1997 Constitution would be scrapped. He announced lifting of martial law in 2012.
- 2012 Again, the Constitution Commission provided a Draft Constitution intended to pave way for the return to democracy with free Elections in 2014.
- 2013 (10th January) Government rejected the Constitution Commission's Draft.
- 2013 (March) Government released its own Constitution Draft for public comments which resulted in the current Constitution we have.

Madam Speaker, today we are at the crossroads, the *coups* of 1987 and 2000 have been emphasised over and over again by the FijiFirst Government, again in His Excellency the President's Address. What about the *coup* of 2006 - was it a *coup* or a takeover? That is something that we need to determine. It is a dumb question which does not require a smart answer.

That *coup* was an excuse to launch the political careers of those in the FijiFirst Government and, indeed, to launch the FijiFirst Party. Do all in the FijiFirst Party understand that they are the products of an evil plot and conspiracy? I am not sure. Of course, they know it, they choose to help themselves with taxpayers' funds without caring about the evil roots of the movement.

I remember the holier than thou pronouncements in 2006 that this auction was for the betterment of the nation and no one will benefit. That was what was told at that time. Well, look across the room and figure out who have amassed wealth from 2006 to 2018, and continue to earn indecent salaries in excess of \$200,000, while not allowing the \$4 increase.

Madam Speaker, the sad fact is that the FijiFirst Leader continues to deny that he embarked on an evil venture in 2006, and that the legally-elected Government was violently removed by him and his schemers. When will this be stopped? Only SODELPA will stop this, and with only 50.02 percent, FijiFirst will soon be confined to history. In fact, let me pose the question: what will happen to FijiFirst after Bainimarama goes? What will happen?

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- All his votes will disappear and where will you be? That is the problem. FijiFirst will collapse.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Thank you, you may continue.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The other issue is about the voting system, because of the Proportional Election System set up in the imposed 2013 Constitution, was purposefully designed to zero-in political support to one man and it was planned and manipulated through strategies via State-controlled media, such as the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) and the *Fiji Sun*. When you look at who is doing the manipulation - an overseas consultant paid for by our money.

Qorvis was hired for this purpose of 'hero worship' and 'cult personality', nurturing the image of a saviour, an amazing strategy to manipulate the people of Fiji whereby the manipulated paid for their own manipulation. That is totally amazing. It was a brilliant idea, had such a great impact that the brainwashed even called him the "messiah"....

(Laughter)

... an insult to the Christians, who know only one "Messiah" which is Jesus Christ.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I'm not lying!

Madam Speaker, let me share what is in the Amnesty International Report on the human rights abuses resulting from the *coup* you were supporting in 2006.

Nimilote Verebasaga, aged 41, died on 5th January, 2007; six hours after being taken into Military custody at Nausori, from haemorrhage of internal organs.

Madam Speaker, 19 year old Sakiusa Rabaka, on 24th January, 2007 was severely beaten and forced to do military exercises at Blackrock Military Base. Eight police officers and one Military Officer tried to avoid liability but injunctions stopped them from going to the UN.

Honourable Members, let me tell you the truth. On June 2007, Tevita Malasebe was beaten to death by police in Valelevu Police Station.

On 23rd July, 2008, escaped prisoner, Joseva Baleiloa, was beaten up by police. All these are a culture imposed by the 2006 *coup*.

Iowane Benedito was beaten and sexually abused in 2012 by Military officers.

Honourable Members, in August 2014, Vilikesa Soko died after being beaten and sexually assaulted ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- ... 1987

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- This is from Amnesty International Report, I am not making it up.

On 18th October, 2016, a video released on social media showing three police officers beat him up.

Two months ago, Josua Lolouvaki, a member of the Rewa Rugby Union and I am the president, was assaulted and killed by police officers. I do commend, however, the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Qiliho, for acting promptly and the internal processes of the Police Force which has improved for the efficient investigations, resulting in the custody of two officers. As President of the Rewa Rugby Union, this death deeply affected us, all members of our rugby team. We are still hurt today by what had happened, and so are all the relatives and victims. I urge the FijiFirst Government to look into the adequate compensation as I am sure we all have a heart like human beings.

Again, I quote from this Report:

“The lack of independent oversight and near-impunity for such crimes increase the risks of torture and ill-treatment occurring. The police are effectively left to police themselves ...”

Madam Speaker, that Amnesty International Report emphasises throughout the importance of knowing and understanding what happened in 2006.

Going to the Yash Ghai Commission, this 2013 Constitution, Honourable Members, is another issue which we need to understand and ensure that justice is served.

Professor Brij Lal, in his assessment adds, and I quote:

“The Constitution contains provisions that make a mockery of the Westminster system of government. The powers of the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General are considerably enhanced. The consultative provisions and governing role of the Leader of the Opposition are gone. The Prime Minister chairs the ‘independent’ Constitutional Offices Commission. The Chief Justice is appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister.”

He goes on to state so many other criticisms regarding the Constitution. After reading this article, I then understood why Professor Brij Lal is banned from Fiji. This is a very inhumane and totally wicked decision. Professor Brij Lal was our lecturer at USP, someone who should be awarded the highest service award by our nation and respected. He and his wife are model citizens, they are good human beings, victimised by the FijiFirst Government.

Honourable Members, we read what happened to Professor Yash Ghai on 10th November in the *Fiji Times*. You all read how he was bundled off into the aircraft and sent off to Australia.

At this juncture, we must recognise the following facts:

1. Only 50.02 percent elected FijiFirst;
2. Opposition are the legitimate representatives of close to 50 percent of the population;
3. FijiFirst and the Opposition must and have to work together, we must learn to dialogue and listen to the other 50 percent of the nation; and
4. Just because FijiFirst is the government, it does not mean that they govern unilaterally, they do not have the mandate.

The Government side condemned our leader for the 1987 *coup*. What the Member was doing in condemning, he did not understand that our leader was the one who initiated the review of the Constitution in 1990 which resulted in the 1997 Constitution. He accepted the 1987 *coup* was wrong and he had made amends for those actions. The cheap shot from the Government Member, who is too young to remember the good deeds of past leaders, did not bother our Opposition Leader.

Our Opposition Leader said, “Do not look at people who consider you an enemy as your enemy, but look at him as your friend.”

Honourable Members, the 1987 and 2006 *coups* must complete the cycle. It must complete because at this point in time it has not completed, like the 1990 Constitution. We need to look at it. We need to review the 2013 Constitution. We need to vote together to reach a solution because this side of the House is 50 percent of the population, you are 50 percent, and I am suggesting as per the proposal by the Leader that we all work together, that we look at a joint Constitutional Commission to move the nation forward, re-negotiate the provision and come to an agreement.

Madam Speaker, seriously speaking, we are at a political stalemate and there is no other choice for the Fiji Government but to work with the Opposition. We need partnerships on the review of the 2013 Constitution, joint committees in terms of constituency issues. I can see that Honourable Members on the other side are agreeing, I can see good people on the other side, that everything is possible.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Everyone is good on this side.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- And the other thing I would like to add before I finish is that, our Party Leader, Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka had stated publicly that it is time for *coup* leaders to exit the political arena. He is ready to do that, what about your leader? And so should FijiFirst Leader, Honourable Bainimarama. The time will soon be upon us for Frank Bainimarama to realise this, step down and allow the next line of leadership to take over our nation in order to move forward.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Members, there are other issues that I would like to touch on, the last one I will discuss before I conclude is on the national identity.

We are being called Fijians but in the Fijian version of the Constitution I notice, and I quote: “*Na lewe ni vanua taucoko e Viti sa vakatokai na kai Viti.*”

HON. MEMBER.- Your Former Leader of Opposition has accepted

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Members, this shows the misunderstanding of all the Fijian words. In Fijian, when you look at the origin it means “indigenous Fijian”, it is derived from the word “*Fisi*” which the Tongans label, the “indigenous Fijians”. However, when it is translated in this Constitution, it says “*Viti*” that “*Na kai Viti taucoko sa kai Viti*”. That is the confusion in meaning which means, how many other confusions are in this Constitution?

A lot of things had been mentioned, so to conclude, I am suggesting that we work together, we look at a joint Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution to move us forward, to move away from the illegal or invalid situation we are in now in order that we come to an agreement in the next four years and not continue to run further down in this Honourable House.

Honourable Members, the other issues that I intend to touch on, I will now just summarise, given the lack of time. There are a lot of successes for FijiFirst but a lot of failures.

I now wish you a very Merry Christmas.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: it is an honour and a special privilege to be called to serve in this House and, just as all of us believe that we will all do, I will do my best to be able to serve to the best of my ability.

Madam Speaker, congratulations on your reappointment for another term, and congratulations also to the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar on her appointment as Deputy Speaker. I congratulate all those who have been called to serve in this House. Congratulations to those who have made it back into Parliament and congratulations also to all our new Honourable Members.

I congratulate all the women for being able to make it into Parliament this time around, and I give thanks to my God for His grace for putting me here. I thank FijiFirst; its President, *na Gone*

Turaga na Tui Macuata; its Leader, the Honourable Prime Minister; and it is a privilege to be part of the FijiFirst Movement.

I also need to thank those who helped me on this journey in this campaign:

- The Tavura, Usamate and Bilivalu families all around Fiji and around the world;
- Inia Tubui, Navitalai Niunitoga, Ilimo Marau, Keleai Matiyavi and their teams here in the Central Division;
- Tevita Vunileba in Koro, Mika Qiri in Ovalau, Mika Vosayaco and Isaia Nainoca in Cakaudrove, Pio Cavuilati and his team in Taveuni, Mocolutu, Maciu, *Turaga Na Ramasi* in Nasaqalau, Sikeli Marau in Waciwaci and Vatusoko in Yadrana, all from Lakeba;
- Joji Mate in Vanuavatu, Filipe Temo in Kabara, Sakeasi Makoto and Jonani Kamanalagi for their assistance from Dravuwalu in Kadavu. A special thank you to the people of Nasaqalau, Lakeba, Lau; Dravuwalu, Naceva, Kadavu; Nasasa in Vunivutu, Nadogo, Macuata for their support; the people of Cakaudrove, especially from Taveuni, Qamea; Karoko and Kalabu in Naitasiri and Nasinu areas generally, for their support during this campaign.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has highlighted issues of importance for all of us. He has shown us the path and has reminded us of the important things that we need to focus on. His Excellency has reminded us that as Honourable Members of this august House, we must talk nothing else but the truth. This is after all a House of Honour. Any statement made here must be based on fact.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- No more half-truths or untruths. Fiji needs that and we owe it to the people of Fiji to speak truth.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the last FijiFirst Government and this current one is all about providing for our children and for our future generations. This is a Government that has been one that walks the talk and this new Government will also be one that will continue to walk the talk.

Fiji is fortunate to have as a leader our Honourable Prime Minister. He has shown his strong leadership abilities, like a good naval officer, he has commanded our ship well, braving and overcoming all types of weather conditions. I wish to also thank the Honourable Prime Minister for entrusting me with a very critical portfolio - the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, and I want to acknowledge the dedication of my predecessors and colleagues, the Honourable Parveen Bala and Honourable Vijay Nath.

I agree wholeheartedly with His Excellency the President when he reminded us that, I quote:

“We see modernity in the new roads, bridges, ports, jetties and airports constructed to a quality that matches anything you will find overseas in developed nations.”

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is testimony to what the FijiFirst Government has been doing these past four years. Madam Speaker, infrastructure and transport are enablers to economic growth. Our unprecedented economic growth over the past nine years speaks volumes of how well Government has carefully planned our economic journey, and that is what we expect from a Government.

This is a Government that will ensure that we continue to develop the right infrastructure for this country as we have been doing since FijiFirst first came into power.

Madam Speaker, Government is working towards developing a sustainable energy sector, one that is accessible and consistent which meets the required standards of safety and security and is also financially viable. Government has set an ambitious target of 100 percent access to electricity by the Year 2021. Our target also is to have 100 percent of our electricity generated from renewable sources by the Year 2036. Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) has a 10-year Power Development Plan which focuses on areas covered under the EFL Grid Network, including Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Ovalau and Taveuni.

Madam Speaker, with the right plans, resources and legislative environment in place, the Government will build and maintain resilient infrastructure in Fiji. I want to reassure the Honourable Jale and Honourable Lalabalavu that we are working towards energising the homes of our friends and relatives in Waibau and Sawanamate, Tunuloa through our EFL and Department of Energy Programmes. I would like the Honourable Bilitavu to know that I endorse the comments on standards highlighted by the Assistant Minister. Our nation's power infrastructure is being built according to international standards, specifically British, Australia and New Zealand standards.

HON. GOVERNMENT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, as a responsible Government, we are mindful of the quality of services that we provide and the high risks involved to ensure that the people of Fiji are well protected from our energy infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, the transport industry contributes about 8 percent of our GDP in Fiji. It plays a vital role in connecting commuters to schools, institutions, employment centres, hospitals as well as logistics and merchandise supply chain. Being a large ocean island State, we have a mammoth task to provide and maintain safe shipping services between our 110 inhabited maritime islands and 150,124 square kilometres of waters. Currently, we have 1,585 registered ships administered by MSAF with 10 Vessels from the Government Shipping Services, 13 inter-island vessels and the rest range from small open boats, fishing vessels, charter vessels including cargo and passenger vessels. Our economical routes to the maritime provinces are catered by the roll-on roll-off vessels.

Madam Speaker, through the shipping franchise scheme at the Government Shipping Services we continue to provide shipping services to our uneconomical routes. In 2014, we increased the number of franchise trips per month from 10 in 2012 to 14. This is an increase from 120 to 158 trips per annum. Out of the nine franchise routes, five are serviced twice a month and four once a month, therefore under this four-year reign of FijiFirst, there has been a significant improvement in providing shipping service and we will continue to improve on that service.

Through the franchise scheme, Government will continue to engage the services of our local shipping operators. Furthermore, should any private operator face difficulties, the Government Shipping Services are there to provide a safety net as an alternative vessel to maintain this service. We will continue with our aids to navigation programme, however, as suggested by a Member in the House, we do not recommend the use of vehicle reflectors to be installed on small boats travelling at night as has been suggested in this House. This is a safety issue. Boats travelling at high speeds in the night would have no time to manoeuvre safely even if vehicle reflectors are on other boats.

Speaking about safety, Madam Speaker, I request the Honourable Qereqeretabua to, please, advise her relatives to use the franchise trips which have increased from once to twice a month and no more travelling on overloaded vessels with limited number of lifejackets available. I urge everyone of this august House to work with the Government to ensure that only boats with proper electronic navigational aid travel day and night. Beacons are an aid to navigation for use during daylight hours. As our contribution to COP 23 commitment, Government through consultations with our stakeholders is piloting the implementation of a new energy-efficient designed vessel. Government has increased its fleet by purchasing four new vessels which is a 50 percent increase and brings the total number of Government fleet to 12 vessels in total.

Madam Speaker, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) plays a very important role in the economic development of this country with a vision of steering Fiji safely. Over the past four years, there has been a 25 percent increase in vehicles registered. In addressing this, the Authority has implemented a number of initiatives. These include the opening of new offices, extending operating days to Saturday, convenient online services, introduction of complaints management system and improved awareness to ensure that our customers are accessible to the services.

LTA has opened up since 2014 nine new centres, and that has improved the service that they provide. There has been a much stronger focus on better educating Fijians on road safety measures, new initiatives such as pedestrian, passengers and drivers' interventions have taken road safety awareness to another level. In doing so, these awareness programmes have not only enlightened them to be responsible citizens but are also helping to save lives of Fijians everyday. Government will continue to work towards improving our transportation system.

Climate change has largely impacted the smaller island nations in the Pacific, including Fiji and I have been glad to hear a lot of sentiments highlighting the importance of climate change even though every now and then when we talk about the Honourable Prime Minister having to go to attend COP 23 events, people make fun of it. But I am glad to hear now that that sentiment is changing and we are beginning to realise the importance of climate change and the efforts that we need to make, not only within our own country, but also in other countries around the world.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The best way to adapt to climate change is to build resilient to climate vulnerability. To this effect, Government, through the Fiji Meteorological Service continues to work closely with key international partners to build improved systems and services. Through the capital investment already made by Government, we are already able to provide the public with timely warnings in preparation for any adverse weather. An example of this was the recent flood event in April this year in the Western Division that was caused by a tropical depression and our response time was much better compared to past events.

We are committed to the people of Fiji to provide timely and accurate information, aimed at preventing the loss of lives and reduce damages to properties caused by disasters and other catastrophic events.

For National Disaster Management, Madam Speaker, disaster risk reduction is everyone's business and to continue down that path of sustainable development, we need to continue to build the resilience of our infrastructure and key assets through better coordination with all stakeholders. We know that it has been proven that every \$1 spent in disaster-risk reduction results in the savings of \$7 on rehabilitation and reconstruction, so that will continue to be our focus.

We are looking to have the right legislative environment that is supported with good policies and workable plans. Government is undertaking the review of the National Disaster Management Act, reviewing the National Disaster Management Plan of 1995 and formulating a National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy for the Years 2018-2030. We know that we cannot fully control the impact of disasters, but we can instil measures to reduce the impact brought about by these inevitable changes that we will address.

Now, Madam Speaker, I would like to address some of the issues that have been brought up in the House over the duration of our discussions here. This is why I have gone back to the issue of the importance of truth in the House, importance of making sure that every utterance we make is based on facts. We have had one instance in the past when an Honourable Member stood up and said that he had the right to say whatever he wanted to say. I would like to say that all Honourable Members of this Honourable House have the duty and the responsibility to make sure that every utterance that we make is based on facts. The people of this country expect us, as Honourable Members of this House, to make sure that everything that we say is based on fact.

Earlier on this week, Honourable Kuridrani, who is a good friend, classmate and a house mate of mine, *Bulu* House of Lelean Memorial School made the statement this week that he has a concern with the 99-year lease effective from 20th January, 2018 that was done without any consultation with the *Mataqali* Noinau in Koroinasau. The feedback that I have received from iTLTB that there was no lease issued this year. The lease was issued in 1989 and landowners were consulted. Premium and rent was paid and the rent paid to date and distributed to the *mataqali*. In fact, mahogany has matured and the harvested stumpage has been paid to iTLTB and the money distributed. That is one of the instances that I am saying.

Concern was also made about Biausevu Village in the district of Komave, *Mataqali* Ketenatukani – the mahogany plantation of 840 acres that was also issued a 99-year lease. That lease was also covered in the same lease from 1989. So, this is an instance that I am talking about - the importance of making sure that when we bring things up in the House, that they are based on actual facts. People of this country have the right to expect that every utterance that we make is always based on actual fact. We need to check and cross-check all of these issues, so that nothing that we say in this House is based on supposition on what people say.

The other issue that my friend, the Honourable Kuridrani has mentioned was about Raiwaqa Village in the district of Mavua where he stated that in July 2017, their 117 acres of land named Nataba was to have its ownership returned and only 30 acres of land has been returned and the balance of 87 acres is still under occupation by the tenants. From the iTLTB they have informed us that the 30 acres has been reserved for the *Tokatoka/Mataqali* Toakulu. The balance of 87 acres that was referred to in the House has already been set aside as reserved *Mataqali* as published by the Gazette of 19th February, 2018, that is the fact. Now, the whole parcel of land has already been dealt with. Those are some of the issues that I would like to address, Madam Speaker.

The other issue that I would like to address has been brought about and something that has been discussed at great length in the social media in which the Honourable Prime Minister has been attacked at great length about the failure to mention the confederacies during the *veiqaravi vakavanua* that was held for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. I have the utmost respect for the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa in her traditional status as a high chief of Fiji, but the assertion to make that it was the Government of Fiji that decided that we should not mention the confederacies at all, is an utter lie. That did not take place.

The Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs has confirmed that they had asked the people of Vuda to perform that, there was no directive given to them not to mention the traditional confederacies. They

had mentioned all of the provinces as well as at the end. When the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs briefs the different parts of Fiji on handling this traditional ceremony, they do not tell them exactly what to do, they will explain the purpose of it. So, in view of the Honourable Ro Teimumu's outburst, I do not think this is a true reflection of how we do this in our culture that we like to talk about. In our traditional culture, when we have resolved things through traditional protocol, we do not come and talk about it openly like that. We do it in our traditional sense - that is one issue that I would like to talk about.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Niko Nawaikula keeps talking about this issue of the sunset clause, as if it was some big boogeymen or something that is out there as if this side of the House is going to be illuminated by that. What do we mean by sunset clause?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- What do we mean by sunset clause? We have sunset clauses in everything in our lives. Our ethnic culture, our *iTaukei* culture have ethnic clauses in everything that we do. We go back 200 years, we did not dress like this. There was a sunset to the way we used to dress.

You go back 200 years where you built a *burekalou*, you put people into the pit and then you put the poster on top of them, there has been a sunset to those things. Things have been changing, language changes.

A few years ago when you were living in villages, if you want to go to towns and cities, you had to seek approval to leave. Now, you do not do that, so all of these things begin to change. What I am trying to say, we change the things that are known for us to change, we begin to change them in order to make sure that they are compatible with the environment in which we live in. So this whole idea about sunset is not about eliminating people, it is about making sure that we are adapting to the changes that are existing in our society.

Madam Speaker, many many years ago, our children were told, "*Tiko lo, tiko lo, tiko lo*", meaning "Shut up, do not talk." Now, if you want people to succeed in school, we want them to talk, we want them to question so there has to be a sunset also to that idea of telling people just to shut up. This is the point that we are talking about. As a culture evolves, as it changes, there are certain aspects of that culture that have to evolve.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- We have a culture.

The Honourable Members on the other side like to talk about us on this side of the House as traitors. Honourable Madam Speaker, there are many *iTaukei* in this country. If you dress differently or the way you talk, that does not take away the fact that you are an *iTaukei*, *iTaukei* and its culture are defined by registration in the *Vola ni Kawa Bula*. It does not mean that we have to all look alike. The way the people think in the village does not necessary have to be the way the people think in the peri-urban areas but even if the difference is there, we are still *iTaukei*. There is no stereotype way of thinking about this idea when you are an *iTaukei*.

Madam Speaker, the other thing that I want to talk about is that, there is a lot of mention about Village By-laws. There was a lot of notion going around that this Government is trying to shove Village By-laws down people's throats, nothing like that happened. All that was happening was consultation, this is a Government that bases everything that it does on consultation.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- We have now a very strong focus on consultation in everything that we do for *i Taukei*, so all of these hullabaloo that we talk about are entirely based on supposition.

I think the last thing that I would like to mention before I sit down is that, the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua talked about the fact that this Government, this group of people, has been all about compartmentalisation. I just like to say that we are the ones that have brought in the 2013 Constitution to make sure that we do not compartmentalise.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. I wish all Honourable Members a Merry Christmas and a very prosperous New Year.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. At this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Please, note that lunch is provided to the Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room. Thank you, Honourable Members. The Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.59 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable George Vegnathan to take the floor.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Madam Speaker, Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Leader of the Opposition, Members of Parliament, Parliament Support Staff, media and our viewers through television, guests in the gallery and the Fiji public: *Ni sa Bula Vinaka, Namaskaram, Ram ram, Sastriye Kaal, Asalaam Waleh Kum*, Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I am deeply honoured and privileged to make my maiden speech as a Member of Parliament and as the Assistant Minister for Sugar.

Madam Speaker, I wish to join other Honourable Members of Parliament in congratulating you for your appointment as Speaker of this House for the second term of four years. Your remarkable achievement is testimony to women of this country of what they can achieve through their hard work, dedication and commitment.

Madam Speaker, I am really thankful to the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Attorney-General for their guidance, vision, assistance and great leadership.

Madam Speaker, I quote what our Honourable Prime Minister said regarding Building a new Smarter Fiji, and I quote:

“We have been able to do things that previous generations of Fijians could only dream about, including free schooling for our young people, more scholarships and a Tertiary Loans Scheme Programme. Even the most disadvantaged Fijian child now has the chance to get proper education, and we have established a network of technical colleges across the country to give our young people access to better trade skills and increase our nation's skills based - all those things like properly trained plumbers, electricians, carpenters, mechanics, cooks that any country needs, to be successful.

Madam Speaker, I am very proud to be with the Prime Minister's team who has the people of this country at heart.

Madam Speaker, standing before you is Mr. George Vegnathan, a true son of the Friendly North, Babasiga, Labasa. I reside in the Village of Vunika, which is next to Fiji's historical snake god temple, coming from the Friendly North.

Madam Speaker, I wish to assure all Honourable Members that I will be friendly to all. I am proud to be from Labasa, which is the home town of the Northern Development Programme, initiated by the FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, I started my career as a high school teacher and served in the following schools:

- Holy Family Secondary School;
- All Saints Secondary School;
- Valebasoga Secondary School;
- Naleba College; and
- Nadogo College.

I retired as a High School Principal in 2014 from Holy Family Secondary School. I thank my parents and the Almighty God for making me a teacher to bring light into the lives of many rural children of this nation. A lot of them are working for the Government, private enterprises or managing their own families.

Madam Speaker, I would sincerely like to thank my wife, Roshni Nathan, and my four children - Jaishni Nathan, Noel Vishal Nathan, Devina Nathan and Rahul Nathan; sons in law - Rajneil Chandra and Marco and their friends, Beverlyn and Swetha, for their love and support.

I also have three beautiful grandchildren who are source of comfort and relaxation during these stress and trying times.

Special thanks go to my relatives: Gopal Ramaiya, Sadhana, Sashi, Romi, Dharmendra, Vishwa, Roshni Achari, Asha, Vicky and my mother in law.

I wish to also thank my brothers and sisters; worker colleagues, General Secretary - TISI Sangam, Fiji, Mr. Danem Goundar and the CEO, Mr. Jai Narayan, the President and Executives of TISI Sangam, Labasa and all its ancillary staff where I worked for a year before joining politics.

Thanks to the students that I taught for their tremendous support to get me this far. They all recognized the potential in me to serve the nation through this prestigious Parliament with honesty and sincerity.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to accord my sincere appreciation to close friends and relatives from the villages of Vunika, Batinikama, Siberia, Bulikela, Vunivau, Nagigi, Naleba, Coqeloa, Lagalaga, Kilikoso, Wavuwavu, Karokaro, Waiqele, Vunimoli, Tabucola and Seaqaqa who assisted me in my campaign and also acted as polling agents during the 2018 General Elections. I also acknowledge the constant moral support of families from abroad, who were constantly in touch during the campaign period.

My sincere thanks also go to some very special friends:

- Koto of Soasoa Village and Moreni of Nagigi Village (who would sit with the villagers to explain the mission, vision and achievements of the FijiFirst Government, and most importantly tell the truth);
- Together with these two gentlemen, Ram Jas of Vunivau, Master Sebastian James Singaram of Lautoka who released the first iTaukei song album in the 1980s;
- My cousins: Robert Sahayam, Martin Sahayam, Rakesh Mudaliar of Siberia, Lankesh of Tabucola in Labasa, Arthur, Jiten Maniam, Deo Narayan, Manoj, Naren Sami, Kamlesh, Hari Nadan and Albert of Vunika, Bhola Sanmogam of Naleba, Mukesh of Karokaro and Kesh Reddy of Nubu, Labasa, Ashok and Ranga;
- my brother, Paras Ram, and Dewa Nand of Suva and the Sahayams Fiji-wide and their spouses and children.

I thank them for assisting with my campaign.

Madam Speaker, I wish to dwell a little on my background. I come from a large family of 12 siblings and I am the ninth. My parents, David Sahayam and Mary Sahayam, decided to give me up for adoption when I was three weeks old to a childless couple who lived in Vunika. This happened because

my dad, without my mum's knowledge, had promised the couple through his friend that the next child born to them would be given away to this couple. I therefore grew up with my foster parents, the late Mr. Sita Ram and the late Mrs. Muniamma who later on went to have three children of their own - two boys, late Mr. Bal Ram, Mr. Paras Ram and a sister, Rukh Mani.

Life was a struggle while growing up in the rural community of Vunika where job was scarce and wages was low. My father struggled to support us and put us in schools. Some days we did not go to school because fees was not paid. Some days we did not even have flour for roti, so my mother used to ask us to have lunch at an uncle's place next to the school. My uncle, late Ram Murti and his family shared the same compound with his brother and his wife, his sister and her husband and her family. Altogether, they had 15 children of their own and sometimes they had to accommodate 10 more children of relatives for lunch, and they did it with love, while grandfather late Apanna Murti would look on and talk to all the grandchildren. At this point in time, I would also like to accord my sincere thanks to the descendants of the late Apanna Murti family for their support at the time when we needed it most.

A few years later, the health of my father deteriorated and he could only manage to go to work three or four days a week. Life became so difficult that at one stage, I was compelled to quit school in the middle of Form Six or Year 12, as it is known today, to support my family.

For two weeks, I roamed around the village, trying to work out what I was going to do to get some income to support my family. Fortunately, I had learnt a bit of carpentry and joinery from my father and this became handy to bring a bit of income for the family, but my dad was very disappointed to see me not going to school. One evening when he was having his basin of grog and smoking Fiji tobacco, he very gently told us how he struggled to work in the hope of giving us the best education. He said that despite his ill health, he was supporting us and all he wanted me to do was to go back to school and complete the year.

That night I cried bitterly, realising the sacrifice that he was making. The next morning I went back to school and my very kind teacher, Satish Lal took me back into the form. I wanted to be an electrical engineer but situation was such that I settled to become a teacher to support my family. I only wish the opportunities offered by FijiFirst Government now, were available then, not only me, but so many students of my time would have had their dreams realised.

My parents, though illiterate, believed that the only way out of the poverty cycle was through education. Their hard work and dedication has paid dividends. My prayers are that souls of both sets of my parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Sita Ram and the late Mr. and Mrs. David Sahayam rest in peace with the Lord.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government will ensure that the Fijians of today do not face such situations in life. One of the mission statements of FijiFirst is "transform Fiji into a modern nation state". The focus of FijiFirst is to improve the lives of all Fijians by growing the economy. FijiFirst's sound economic policies have proven to attract investment, which are creating quality jobs for Fijians, especially for young people. There are plans to do much more."

Fiji has one of the most developed economies in the Pacific region. The economy relies on its natural resources. Fiji is a resource-rich country and it is up to all of us to empower our people to take full advantage of it through proper guidance and support.

Madam Speaker, Robert Kennedy (Junior) once said, and I quote:

“Our landscapes connect us to our history; they are the source of our character as a people, as well as our health, our safety, and our prosperity. Natural resources enrich us economically, yes. But they also enrich us aesthetically, recreationally, culturally and spiritually.”

I realise I will be working directly under a very well-respected, dynamic and proactive leader, who believes in action and not hollow promises. He is no other than our Prime Minister, who is the Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Sugar Industry. It is truly an honour to be chosen to assist our Prime Minister in his Ministry.

Madam Speaker, the livelihood of 200,000 people depend on the sugar industry. According to 2017 FSC Annual Report, FSC is the largest sector employer with a workforce of around 2,000 individuals during peak crushing season. According to the provisional data of the Reserve Bank of Fiji 2017, the sugar industry contributes 1.1 percent of GDP and generates about 5.3 percent of total exports. Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has continually searched for ways and means to improve the livelihood of farmers and put more in their pockets at the end of the day.

FijiFirst is not only providing assistance through subsidies and price guarantees, but has also been listening to the farmers' demands on what further assistance can be provided to improve their livelihood. Cane farming in hilly areas remain a challenge for cane farmers as hilly areas currently cannot be fully utilised and as such, FijiFirst Government will be providing additional \$900 per hectare for such land preparation. This is additional to \$2,000 per hectare already committed under the current cane planting grants scheme for land preparation and planting.

Madam Speaker, it is important that our hardworking sugarcane farmers feel that they have a future in the sugar industry. The Government is now moving towards making sugarcane farmers shareholders in FSC by allocating 10 percent shares and that they will now have a voice in FSC.

This is a milestone achievement for sugarcane farmers in recognition of their generations for toiling the land. It is important that we continue to modernise the sugar industry through the continued injection of mechanisation. We see now that 60 mechanical harvesters in operation and the FijiFirst Government remains committed to introducing mechanical harvesters for hilly areas.

Transportation of cane will also see revisionary changes by introduction of cage bins, trans loading centres and introduction of in-fielders. It is crucial to increase the crop yield as sugarcane farmers can increase their income significantly with increasing tonnes per hectare production in the same plot of land. The FijiFirst Government remains committed to look at provisions for providing disease-free seedling, means of improving soil health and most importantly, irrigation, to ease prolonged periods of drought.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has demonstrated its commitment to reduce grower cost and ensure that the sugar industry is viable for cane farmers, through targeted financial support to the Ministry of Sugar and through Government guarantee to Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC).

The Government continues to recognise the needs of cane farmers and set aside budgetary support in the current season amounting to \$62.3 million and also an establishment of a Sugar Stabilisation Fund, to guarantee an \$85 tonne cane price for the next three years. If you combine the budget support through subsidies such as fertilizer, weedicide, cane transfer, allocation for repair of cane access roads and construction of in-field drainages, new farmers and mechanisation assistance, to name a few, the total support to growers is well in excess of \$100 per tonne. This has never been done before by any Fijian Government.

The current FijiFirst Government has the capacity and prudent financial management ability to deliver these kinds of positive results. I am determined to build on the success of the last four years of Government to ensure continuity and even brighter future for our farmers in the cane sector. We stand together to make the cane and life of cane farmers much more sweeter.

I fail to understand, Madam Speaker, as to why the Leader of NFP has failed to see these initiatives while campaigning in cane belt areas.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his eloquent and thought-provoking speech. We must rise above our prejudices and build a just and fair society where all citizens of Fiji are beneficiaries. Let us all be proud of our multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual Fiji. We have lived peacefully here and let us develop the culture of peace.

Madam Speaker, the President, in his speech, stressed on leadership. Leadership is about vision and responsibility, not power. The FijiFirst Party has a great vision for Fiji and it has taken the responsibility to develop a modern Fiji. Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. All developments you see in Fiji is exactly this vision. Let us all cooperate and run the Fiji development race together. The end result will leave our children much happier.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to the challenges that lie ahead and will make meaningful contributions to materialise our dream of a prosperous and a modern Fiji. May God bless Fiji and our people.

As we are coming into the festive season and Christmas is a few weeks away, I wish all Honourable Members a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Please, do not look at lamb chops, beer and butter to bring joy to the family this Christmas, but look at the good celebrations where the whole family will enjoy good, nutritious meal in an environment of prayer, love and care. Thank you very much and God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola to take the floor.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: First and foremost, I acknowledge the grace of the Almighty God; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit for the unflinching and unconditional love granted to me and my humble beginning in life through traditional and spiritual upbringing by my late grandparents, Mr. Simione and Mrs. Sera Dau Bakani; my late grandmother, Mrs. Inise Vosanibola; and now ultimately being chosen to be a Member of this august House.

Madam Speaker, I rise as the last respondent from this side of the House. In submitting my contribution on the motion before the House and wholeheartedly thank His Excellency the President for the Opening Address towards the First Session of this Parliament on 26th November, 2018.

Madam Speaker, may I also congratulate you on your second term at this High Office and also Honourable Veena Bhatnagar as your Deputy. On that note, I wish to take this opportunity to wish you a rewarding and productive tenure of office, and express my confidence in your ability to always conduct the business of the House fairly and impartially, in keeping the decorum and dignity of this august House.

Madam Speaker, the debate during the last three days has empowered and strengthened my capacity as a Member of this House. The level of speeches and interjections by Honourable Members of the House really shows me what we have been seeing for the last four years only on television. Therefore, it comes to my mind a Chinese proverb which says, and I quote:

“God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we may listen twice as much as we speak.”

So, this side of the House will listen, as our leaders listen and listen with compassion. On that note, I hope Honourable Members of the House will take heed of that Chinese proverb as we go along during the next four years in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the period leading up to the General Elections has been a time of change and a challenging one for me with new lessons learnt with regards to politics. I have been helped in this by the faith that has sustained me throughout my life, the love through Jesus Christ who is the source of my transformation and I depend on Him entirely to guide me in what is right before God and in my relationship with others, my family, at work, and the society as a whole.

Madam Speaker, I will just add that I am far from perfect in my faith as I often stumble and fall, but I will never stop striving to serve God in the best way I can, to honour Him and to serve the purpose for which He has called me. I know in my heart that what has transpired during the challenging period leading up to the General Elections is part of God's plan on me, and the Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji. He has given me a part to play in this, and I cannot refuse Him.

Madam Speaker, my Christian beliefs tell me that for the great journey in this House, it requires togetherness to succeed, our individual and collective human efforts are not enough, and we must place our trust in the Almighty and seek His blessing and support. A brief prayer before the try conversion by Waisale Serevi, I believe he was solemnly saying, “Lord, I cannot do this alone, I place my trust in you and let your will be done.” I think it applies very much to Fiji at this time. Let us be a God-fearing nation and let His will be done to this Land in which we strongly believe, through our different faiths, in the power of the Almighty.

Madam Speaker, the *Holy Bible* tells us that there is a time for everything, therefore, we are chosen to change the way we conduct our politics and how we deal with national issues. We are called to co-operate with positive engagement rather than confrontation and ill-will. It is time now to move away from the hard-edged and provocative language and action which have been a trademark of this House during the last four years.

Madam Speaker, I would also extend my sincere gratitude and congratulate His Excellency the President for being a champion and ambassador towards Communicable Diseases in Fiji. The Pacific Health Ministers Meeting held in Honiara in 2011 declared Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) crisis in the Pacific. Pacific Island countries are alarmed to be most vulnerable on health and social consequences on the slow action against the disease.

Madam Speaker, the future generation will suffer the full brunt of the NCDs' burden and the Government will face long term financial burden of large budget proportion allocated in addressing the never-ending treatments and medications, if control measures are not implemented by all stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, the health environment had undergone a massive transformation over the last two decades which has promoted countries to invest in research to respond accordingly. Our people are being exploited to more cheaper goods that are unhealthy, people are eating under-nutritious meals, increased tobacco and alcohol consumption, work stress and lack of physical activities.

Madam Speaker, Fiji currently faces a wide array of issues under NCDs, such as the highest incidences of diabetes, obesity, and 8 percent of all deaths reported were due to NCDs. Research shows that the productivity of overweight and obese employees is much lower than employees in the healthy weight category.

Madam Speaker, the first line of response to the crisis has traditionally been seen as the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. The importance of a concerted effort in fighting the crisis as a team to consist other key stakeholders in the public, as well as the private sector. Therefore, I acknowledge and thank the former Minister for Health, Honourable Akbar, and staff for the NCD Intervention Programmes implemented, together with relevant stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, due to the continued increase in cases of our citizens suffering from NCDs, I duly recommend that there is still an urgent need to revisit the holistic and collaborative approach in tackling the crisis as coordinated by the Wellness Unit of the Ministry of Health. The approach is in line with the Healthy Island Concept which was declared at Yanuca Island in 1995 by the Ministers for Health in the Pacific and its vision, which is still relevant today, and I quote:

“Children are nurtured body and mind. Environment invites learning and leisure, people live, work and age with dignity, ecological balance is a source of pride, and the oceans/ rivers which sustain us must be protected.”

Madam Speaker, I commend the healthcare facilities and programmes to be implemented as highlighted by the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health, Honourable Alexander O'Connor. Nevertheless, the Health Services and its programmes throughout the country need a massive review and evaluation of the NCD intervention programmes, commencing from primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare.

Madam Speaker, it is also unfortunate to note the occurrence of meningococcal disease outbreak and the 1,854 confirmed cases of dengue fever this year alone, which underscores the lack of political commitment to reform and upgrade our health and hospital services and facilities, rather encouraging the participation of the private sector in Government core business, as announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy this year.

Madam Speaker, this defeats the goal of universal health coverage because it will place basic healthcare services beyond the reach of the majority of our population. It is the responsibility of the Government to provide basic healthcare services to all citizens.

Madam Speaker, I believe that “health for all” have been our guiding vision for the last four decades of development in Fiji by our founding fathers. International experience has shown time and again that universal health coverage is achieved when political will and commitment are strong.

Madam Speaker, as usually highlighted by the other side of the House that no Fijian or citizen to be left behind on Government's service provision as today highlighted by the Honourable Jale Sigarara, I think the advice given to the Lomaiviti lady by the Honourable Prime Minister, to seek post-*TC Winston* rehabilitation assistance to the Provincial Administrator for the fifteenth time, the slow progress on *TC Winston* rehabilitation and the continued usage of tents in villages on Koro Island, the continued usage of tents in Naigani Village, Batiki Island, the incomplete machinery landslide debris clearing, destroyed school buildings and villagers still dwell in tents at Dreketi Village on Qamea Island, clearly contradict that statement.

Madam Speaker, may I request the other side of the House to review their coverage and their status of service delivery for the last four years, and always provide service to all Fijians fairly and not taking into account their political affiliations.

Madam Speaker, I wish to highlight some issues that need action by the responsible line Ministers on the other side of the House:

1. the construction of the Nairai Island Jetty, as committed by the Honourable Prime Minister;
2. the reticulation piped water supply system for the 10 villages on the island of Moturiki;
3. the re-establishment of the existing Public Works Depot with permanent staff and road works machines on the island of Koro, Gau, Ovalau, Kadavu and Lakeba, to ensure constant road works upgrading and maintenance; and
4. re-visit to the 14 villages of Koro Island, Naigani Village of Batiki Island and Dreketi Village on the island of Qamea, to assess the status of rehabilitation works being carried out, including their schools.

Madam Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the kind support of the people of Fiji towards the General Elections and indeed, to all Honourable Members of this august House of whom I offer my congratulations.

I also wish to put on record my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to:

- My wife, Taraivini Vosanibola, and our four children;
- My parents – Mr. Joseva and Mrs. Ana Vosanibola, and my six siblings with their families;
- Family of the late Honourable Anare Vadei and our family members overseas;
- *Turaga na Tui* Tomuna, Dr. Isoa Bakani and families;
- Nadera Methodist Church Circuit Sector, namely, *Mataqali Ifereimi*;
- Circuit Minister, Chief Steward and Congregation of the Nadera Methodist Circuit;
- Our campaign team at the SODELPA Headquarters Office, headed by Mr. Anasa Vocea, Mataiasi Lomaloma, Jale Baba, Sam Savu and all the youths;
- Very importantly, the untiring Kalivati Bale, Lomaiviti SODELPA President, Mr. Nemani Rasea, Mr. Jiuta Vateitei, Watisoni Cakau of Ovalau Island; Mr. Epeli Mataka, Ms. Eleni Luvenitoga, Mr. Sakaraia Koroi of Koro Island; Mr. Marika Tauva, Mr. Ame Vosakoto, Mr. Ilaisa Verevou, Mr. Aporosa Mataitoga, Metuisela Raitautala, Timoci Vinakadina and Solomon Vuniyaro of Gau Island; and
- 100 Party polling agents for their prayers, support, provision of transportation, assistance and the effective observation of the Elections process.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to put on record the people and chiefs in the province of Lomaiviti, and may I quote:

- *Turaga na Ratu mai* Bureta;
- *Turaga na Ratu mai* Moturiki;
- *Turaga na Tui* Wailevu;
- *Turaga na Roko* Takala;
- *Turaga na Tui* Levuka
- *Turaga na* Takala-i-Gau

- *Turaga na Ratu mai* Navukailagi;
- *Turaga na Tui* Vanuaso;
- *Turaga na Tui* Nairai;
- *Turaga na* Toranibau;
- *Turaga na Mata ki* Mudu; and
- *Turaga na* Ratunicawa,

for their ultimate vision and trust in placing their votes on me to become a Member of Parliament in the Republic of Fiji, have been sincerely acknowledged.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I convey my thanks to the 102 voters from the Central Division, 3,454 voters from the Eastern Division, 35 voters from the Western Division, 17 voters from the Northern Division and 32 postal ballot voters, locally and abroad, for placing their trust and votes to Candidate 527.

Madam Speaker, I wish to assure you that the Honourable Members of this side of the House will continue to champion your interests and aspirations. In summing up, I wish to conclude with a quote by the former French President, Charles De Gaulle who had this to say, and I quote:

“The graveyards of the world are full of men who were once considered or those who considered themselves to be indispensable.”

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I urge all Honourable Members in this House and those aspiring to be leaders of this nation in the future to give a thought to these words of wisdom because arrogance, childish behaviour, egocentric mentality, confrontational attitude and selfishness have no place in this nation-building or in this august House.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to the last quote from the former Prime Minister of Fiji, the late Dr. Timoci Bavadra, I quote:

“With humility and honesty, that is part of our living tradition, we must serve the people of the land. That challenge is for all of us. National development plans must ensure that interest of our masses becomes paramount. If the ordinary people lose faith through unfair and inequitable policies, then the future is fraught with uncertainties.”

Madam Speaker, those words of wisdom reflect the respectable culture that chiefs, leaders and elders have taught us, bequeathed us in legacy and deployed to lead us out of and overcome every conflict situation and keep on moving forward as a nation whose people desire and have always enjoyed a degree and measure of freedom, justice, prosperity and unity.

Madam Speaker, I have the honour to support the motion before the House and I wish you all, Honourable Members of Parliament and staff, a Merry Christmas and a fruitful New Year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of the House: It is a privilege for me to deliver my second maiden speech in this

august House and I wish to firstly thank His Excellency the President, for his most gracious Address during the opening of Parliament for this new term.

Madam Speaker, I join my colleagues who have done so before me in congratulating you on your election as the Speaker of Parliament for a second term. I also congratulate the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar for being elected as the Deputy Speaker of the House. I wish to also congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister for his win in the 2018 Elections paving way for the FijiFirst Party to democratically form the Fijian Government for the second time.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- There are many reasons why I joined the FijiFirst Party but two of the most important ones are the visionary inclusive and compassionate leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister and his belief in the capabilities of women in our nation. His passion for progressive development leaving no one behind has been the cornerstone of Government service.

Today, we see the highest number of women serving as Ministers and Assistant Ministers in his Government, upon the invitation of the Honourable Prime Minister. Your own appointment, Madam Speaker, as the first woman Speaker in the Fijian Parliament also validates that point.

On that note, I wish to also congratulate all women who sit as Members of this august House today. Fiji has reached great heights in terms of women in Parliament now. We have women like Adi Losalini Dovi and Mrs. Irene Jai Narayan to thank for paving the way for us.

In 1966, Adi Losalini Dovi was nominated to be one of the first lady Members of the Legislative Council, later elected to Fiji's House of Representatives in 1972, 1977 and 1982. She also served as the Government Whip in the very first Session of Fiji's newly constituted Post-Independence Parliament and became a Member of Cabinet in the portfolios of Urban Development, Women and Social Welfare.

Mrs. Irene Jai Narayan, on the other hand, won a seat in the Legislative Council in 1966, going on to serve in that capacity for quite some time. She also served as a Minister for Indian Affairs and as a Senator during her political career.

Madam Speaker, women like this have left an indelible mark on the generations that follow which continue to see women in Parliament and in positions of national leadership and as high as Deputy Prime Minister for Mrs. Taufa Vakatale and Adi Kuini Bavadra. We are blessed to have their legacy to look up to and knowing that women also have a key role to play in leadership at national level. Today, we have 19.6 percent of this Parliament made up of strong and articulate women leaders and I am confident that more will follow after us. We, as a Parliament, must continue to strive towards the aim of increasing the number of women in Parliament after every Elections until we reach gender parity and beyond.

The FijiFirst Government has, as one of its tenets, the principle of meritocracy. We believe that women can get a seat in this august House on our own merit because we believe in the competency and resilience of Fijian women. We believe that if given the right platform, Fijian women can reach greater heights. We do not believe in temporary special measures which only serve to foster the false belief that women need a lower eligibility bar and special considerations if we are to get into Parliament or other positions of leadership.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Tell them, tell them!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- The Honourable Prime Minister is absolutely correct when he stated on Tuesday, 27th November, 2018 that as a nation we still have a lot of work to do to achieve gender equality in the House. The onus is therefore on us as Parliamentarians. Whilst we have this golden opportunity to do all we can as law makers to ensure that the issues that touch on the lives of Fijian women are addressed. We must also ensure that we put in place policies within this august House which guard against one of the age-old challenges faced by women all over the world in relation to sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

Madam Speaker, gender stereotypes and views have caused a huge gap in the opportunities and treatment between men and women in our society and it is Government's and my personal ambition that this gap be narrowed as much as possible through the work of my Ministry in strong partnership with NGOs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), UN bodies, faith-based organisations and community leaders during this term.

Madam Speaker, I feel like we are going through a revolution as a nation, a gender equality revolution which has largely been propelled by the gender sensitive laws and policies of the FijiFirst Government and fuelled by the excellent work of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, community-based organisations and the like. Diverse in form and shape but united in the aim of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The thing is, Madam Speaker, gender equality needs the changing of mindsets and to do that we need a concerted effort, all of us have a role to play.

We may be sitting on different political platforms but gender equality and ancillary elements of sexual harassment, empowerment of women, respect for women and gender stereotyping transcend politics and lie at the heart of why we, as a nation, still have a long way to go to reach gender parity; and still struggling with our national statistics on gender-based violence. Mindsets need to change.

There is a real need for society to look beyond our dresses, earrings, necklaces, shoes, hair, bags and our makeup and to instead focus on:

- Our merit, the reason why we wanted to join politics;
- The message we have for aspiring female politicians;
- The challenges we face on our journey to Parliament, particularly during the campaign period;
- Our own aspirations as Members of Parliament;
- Issues that one would normally expect to be asked of new politicians on the day of swearing in as Members of Parliament, and therein lies the role of the media in shaping public perception on gender-stereotyping, gender-equality; and
- other issues which when combined continue to drive our national statistics on gender-based violence upwards.

Of the many influences on how we view men and women in society, media is one of the most powerful. Woven through our daily lives, media inculcate their messages into our consciousness at every turn. A fair representation of women leaders in the media and by the media is extremely important, and it is my hope that locally this role will be treated with greater responsibility and that they refrain from promoting stereotypes that perpetuate gender discrimination.

The objectification of fashion policing of women is sadly not just what we used to see in the entertainment magazines any more. Must women really be scrutinised for how we look rather than our leadership skills, decision-making abilities, contribution to nation-building and how we think. More should be done to present women as leaders and role models in the media and to abandon stereotypes. I call on the local media to re-evaluate the way they represent Fijian women Parliamentarians in this new

term, because your articles are influencing a lot of minds out there on their perception of women in leadership.

Women also have a big role to play on this march towards gender equality. For us, female Members of Parliament, who now have the humble privilege to be Members of this august House, the onus is on us to always put our best foot forward when serve. Aspiring female politicians are watching, let us always depict for them the virtues of a great leader, of honesty, integrity, competency, respect, humility and of compassion, encouraging them that this is indeed a calling that they can and must aspire to.

It is our duty as Members of this august House to call out instances of gender stereotyping, sexual harassment and of gender inequality as and when it happens because if you cannot deal with such issues at this level then what hope is there for the rest of this nation. The loss we face as a nation when we leave half of our population behind is far too great, and I feel it is our duty as Parliamentarians to ensure women's overall empowerment and that the economic and political participation is harnessed.

Madam Speaker, traditionally, maiden speeches are to thank those who have helped us along the way to get to Parliament, especially those who have imbued us with a notion of service in public life.

I thank our Heavenly Father, God the Almighty, for His enduring love and guidance and for my unwavering faith in His plan for this great nation, putting the FijiFirst team on this side of the House ...

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- ... to continue to lead this country for yet another term. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for the role he played in getting me here in the first instance, a Prime Minister who genuinely wants to see women in leadership positions and makes sure that the vision becomes a reality through his appointments.

In this quest for the empowerment of women in our nation, gender sensitised leadership is so important, particularly because men still make up the huge majority of leadership at national and at institutional level.

On that note, I would also like to acknowledge the enlightened leadership of the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto and the huge strides that the RFMF has taken under his leadership to encourage capacity-building of military personnel in gender and human rights, and as late as last week advocating against "Violence Against Women and Children" through a themed approach for the Sukuna Bowl; I thank you, Commander.

I call on the heads of such other institutions to work with my Ministry in advocating for gender empowerment within the institutions.

My wonderful family, my husband, who is sitting in the public gallery and our three children - Vasiti, Ditui and Tu, who are watching from home and have always been by my side throughout this journey, I thank you.

There are three strong ladies at home who have helped me discharge my duties as a mother and housekeeper throughout my last term in Parliament: Liku, Seruseru and Bu, I thank you.

My siblings and your respective families for your unwavering support; my extended family, my nephew, Pau, and other nephews and nieces, who have contributed in one way or another in keeping the wheels of family life churning, even in my absence, I thank you.

I also thank Ropate Rakuita, Dialani, Meli Drewati, Neo and Buna Goneyali, in particular, as members of my campaign team, building up towards the 2018 Elections. I also thank the Nakovocake Development Trust for assisting in my campaign on the eve of campaign blackout. Your support is acknowledged and I thank each and everyone of you and your respective families.

Today, I also think of my deceased parents who taught me values I hold dear to this day; values of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of speaking the truth no matter what the cost, ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- ... of honesty, integrity and sheer hard work. They also taught me to be proud of my *i Taukei* heritage and *vanua* obligations that came with it, and in the spirit of that heritage and concomitant obligations. They taught me to respect the diverse ethnicities and cultures around me, to be caring, compassionate and to empower those who are vulnerable in society, to keep my mouth shut, if I have nothing nice to say, but to instead be the change that I wanted to see in people. They taught me that where there is a difference in opinion, no one really wins when there is confrontation, lies and offence, but, to instead look for a solution that brought unity.

Now more than ever, Madam Speaker, we, as Members of this august House, need to be the change that we want to see in our nation; a nation united and richer because of the diverse cultures and ethnicities we have; a nation that finds happiness in the truth and not lies; a nation that is selfless in service and is compassionate and caring of those who are vulnerable in society, and that needs to start here in this august House.

As Members of Parliament, we need to portray the change that we want to see in our nation. Let us be more responsible in the way we make statements in this House. The whole country is watching and listening, let us not lie about things that matter to our people, things that we know will bring about racial discord and vindication. Let us instead articulate our issues better so we on this side of the House can have a better understanding of where you are coming from. Statements like those stated by Honourable Bulanauca in his maiden speech, and I quote:

“The *iTaukei* people must remember that the FijiFirst Party is here to slow down our education, deprive us of our employment, empty our pockets, deprive us of our income and opportunities to become dependent all the time on the Government freebees and lollies, make us slaves in our own country and bury us alive.”

Such statements are irresponsible and takes the honour out of the honourable. Please, articulate yourself. How has Government done that? I must also take this opportunity to refer to the attempt to justify the loss of *iTaukei* land in Denarau and Momi as a land swap instead of a land sale.

The point, Madam Speaker, is this, *i Taukei* land was lost for good. We can call it what we want. The fact remains that *i Taukei* land was lost forever from *i Taukei* landowners. As an *i Taukei*, Madam Speaker, we have a connection with our ancestral lands. It is a connection that is intrinsic to our identity as *i Taukei* people. It identifies us, it defines us. This connection transcends the commercial value of land. So if you take our ancestral land away from us and replace it with some other land of equal commercial value or even greater value, it is not the same. The intrinsic value that every *i Taukei* has with ancestral land is lost when that land is lost to them and their future generations forever. So, yes, that land swap was allowed under the law that existed at that time. Our point is this, if you

really cared about the intrinsic value and the connection that the *i Taukei* people have to their ancestral land then Section 28 of the 2013 Constitution should have been part of our laws way back.

It was only the Bainimarama-led Government in 2012 and 2013 through the Constitution, that brought in the prohibition of *i Taukei* land swaps or sale or conversions or whatever we want to call it, protecting forever the intrinsic value of *i Taukei* land to *i Taukei* people. Instead of preaching about the false notion of loss of *i Taukei* land, I, for one, would love to hear a new tune from the Opposition, a tune that talks about how we can empower the *i Taukei* people to utilise our land for our benefit and the benefit of this great nation.

Madam Speaker, I also take this time to thank my Assistant Minister, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, for her support in the work that we did at the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in the last two years. A special "Thank you" goes to my Permanent Secretary (PS), Directors and staff of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, for their unwavering support in achieving strategic goals of the organisation. To Inise, Peni, Anushka and my Executive Support Unit (ESU) team, I thank you for all that you do.

Last but not least, I thank those Fijians who voted for me, who enabled my being a Member of this august House for another term. I may not know who you are but this I tell you, I will do my utmost to ensure that the faith you have placed in me is not wasted. I thank you most sincerely.

As a Ministry, we have just launched our four-year strategic plan to map out our work for the next term. With the team that is ably led by my Permanent Secretary, Dr. Josefa Koroivueta, and the three innovative Directors for Women, for Social Welfare, and for Poverty Monitoring, I have no doubt that the Ministry will be able to discharge the mandate of Government of the current financial year and indeed for the next three years as well, in empowering women, children, the elderly, those living with disabilities and those living in poverty.

Once again, Madam Speaker, I thank each one that has been a part of my journey so far and I look forward to another term of service to the Fijian people. I look forward to valuable debates in this august House and prosperity for all Fijians.

May you all have a blessed Christmas and may God bless us all. May God bless Fiji. *Vinaka va'alevu* and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite the Honourable Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete to take the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Madam Speaker, it is indeed an honour for me to address this august House after the FijiFirst Election victory and my appointment as the Minister for Health and Medical Services.

I wish to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. I also want to join all the Honourable Members who have spoken before me in congratulating you for being the Speaker of this noble House for a second consecutive term. You carry a purpose and that purpose is obviously for your current position as Speaker of the elected Parliament of Fiji. You are also a role model for all health professionals.

I would like to congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji and the Leader of the FijiFirst Party, Honourable Rear Admiral (Ret'd) Voreqe Bainimarama, and I am very confident of his

leadership and vision for a better Fiji for all. His untiring commitment and dedication to the needs of our nation and the faith shown by the people of Fiji on his leadership, has seen the return of the FijiFirst back to Government. I also congratulate and thank the Acting Prime Minister for his hard work, perseverance and faith in all of us, including me.

Madam Speaker, I also congratulate all Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers; I congratulate the Opposition Leader and all the Parliamentarians; and I wish to give special recognition to all our female Members of Parliament. You are a source of inspiration to all girls and women who are there in the community.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate and thank the FijiFirst Office, the executives, supporters and volunteers because they lay the platform for our success.

Madam Speaker, there are two *Bible* Verses that always remind me of the greatness of God:

1. Psalms 24:1: "*The earth is the Lord's and everything therein.*"
2. John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whosoever believeth in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*"

These *Bible* verses remind me of the beginnings and the love of God and the grace of God that has brought me to this august House.

My relations realistically cover a significant portion of our great land. My mother's heritage is Bemana in Navosa and she was raised by the Druavesi family in Taci, Noco; her mother is from Sawakasa, Tailevu. My father is from a small village in a bay, called Keteira, in Moala. My grandmother is from Matuku in Lau. As with all Lauans in Suva, my father went to primary school, secondary school and worked his way directly to the Fiji Institute of Technology and took himself to Australia to further his studies in engineering.

My mother was raised by her stepfather, Mr. Nemani Druavesi, until her maturity when she joined her father's family and her relatives with the *Tui* Davutukia, the Kolikoli family of Bemana. So, my family, either Niulevu and Keresoni of the *Tui Moala* Clan, the Waqairatu (*Tui Nasau* Clan) of Naroi, Moala, Lau; the Waqainabete, Waqanisau, Vula and Ledua families of Keteira; the Ramasi and Muairewa in Matuku, the *Tui* Davutukia - the Kolikoli family of Bemana, Navosa; the *Tui* Bara - the Druavesi family of Noco, Rewa; the *Tui* Naro - Drugunalevu family of Sawakasa, Tailevu; and my extended relations include the *Tui* Davutukia *i Wai*, *Vunivalu* Korolevu in Vunibau, Nakavu in Nadi, Ba, Rakiraki, Viseisei and many many more.

I realise, Madam Speaker, that I stand on the platform of the dreams that my forefathers have dreamt of in terms of forging the way forth through education and hard work. In my early childhood, I went to numerous schools: Delainamasi Government School, Draiba Primary School, Lelian Memorial School, Natabua High School, Labasa College, Nasinu Secondary School, and I spent a year at the University before going on to medical school. We travelled a lot when I was a child because my father was an engineer with Public Works and my mother was a teacher. As a child growing up in different towns, I came to appreciate our beloved country and the experience gave me the urge to serve the people and also be in a position where I could be able to advocate for learning and serving.

Madam Speaker, growing up in Viti Levu, I also came to fully appreciate the meaning of equality. My mother is from Viti Levu, so when we have large ceremonial functions, I can see that my mother is always very sure of what to do and who to engage to have a successful event. My father, on the other hand, because he came from Lau, I always say that at times he was uncertain of himself and

possibly insecure. I recognise that even within our *i Taukei* community, there are levels of inequality that I could say existed then and probably still exists.

I fortunately did not have those feelings that my father had, because I felt belonged because my mother is from Viti Levu. As I look back now, my faith and resolve towards equality for everyone, forged by my childhood experiences has only been made stronger. It is my sincere wish that no Fijian should ever feel alienated or foreign in this land. The provisions of the 2013 Constitution safeguard and protect the ownership and customary rights of the *i Taukei* on their land; my mother's people and my father's people. The Constitution also provides the fair opportunity for all Fijians to belong and to acquire and own land and properties in a transparent and equitable manner as and when they choose.

Madam Speaker, our *i Taukei* way of life remains the same, and our respect for our chiefs continue. The changes and erosion of our ways cannot be blamed solely on the Government or the Constitution but the lack of training, mentoring and the apprenticeship of our young people in our ways.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I, for one, will attest to this, Madam Speaker. Of course, when I was a young doctor and even until now, most times I do not spend time at home. So, my children grow up learning their mother's dialect of Nakorosule in Naitasiri and so they are Moalan's who speak Naitasiri language whereas for myself, I grew up in the Moalan customs, I had to make *lovo* and *qalu* and so I can see the disconnect already within my own family. There must, Madam Speaker, be a separation of family and the *Yavusa*'s responsibilities in sharing and championing our culture and the work of the State to support that work.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Madam Speaker, during my campaigns I was faced with questions stemming from lies that were given to them by Opposition Parties, and as the last maiden speech, I want to set this straight:

1. Kadavu is not sold and never will be sold;
2. *i Taukei* land remains *i Taukei* land and incompetence in government institutions that deal with the *i Taukei* land will not be tolerated by this Government and we will deal with issues definitively.
3. Fiji's debt burden is small and manageable compared to many other nations, including some first world countries.
4. The 20 cents plastic levy is not given to the Honourable Prime Minister or the Honourable Attorney-General, but is absolutely placed in Government's coffers for development.
5. "Secular State" means that the State is neutral, Madam Speaker, apart from other religions, small churches, like the one I worship in, have the freedom and the right to worship. They cannot be discriminated or marginalised. In the same way, churches celebrate their Sabbaths on Saturdays and some on Sundays, this is protected by the Constitution.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Madam Speaker, I have worked as a Medical Practitioner for 20 years, 12 of those as a qualified surgeon. I have been trained in Fiji and three and a half years of my training had been in New Zealand, namely in Palmerston North and Christchurch. In the last four years I have also had the pleasure of being an Associate Professor of Surgery at the Fiji National University. Madam Speaker, my students, either undergraduate or post graduate are the greatest example of a united Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I want to pay tribute this afternoon to all Health professionals. They are heroes in their own right, occasionally they endure adverse publicity. I am proud to say that I cherish the brotherhood and sisterhood of the medical and health profession.

Madam Speaker, I am greatly honoured to have been given the Health and Medical Services portfolio, one of the most, if not the most important in Government, as health is wealth. I am equally excited as well as challenged when I look at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services Annual Budget for the Financial Year 2018-2019, which is \$334.9 million, an increase of \$13.9 million from the last financial year.

Madam Speaker, we have witnessed some remarkable achievements of this Government in the Health sector. There has been notable progress with the delivery of health services in terms of efficiency, accessibility, equitability, quality and affordability.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has made significant progress in improving health outcomes for our people. Maternal and infant mortality rates have declined, primary health care is well established with major improvements in secondary health care. Substantial investments have been made in the construction and upgrading of hospitals, health centres and nursing stations.

Medical services have been decentralised to ensure convenience and easy access for the communities. I have been part of the CWM where we have been providing outreach services, not only us but Lautoka Hospital and also Labasa Hospital - go out into the communities, Taveuni, for example, Kadavu, up in the Lau Group, all over Fiji providing the services that are available in the main hospitals into all these areas. This is the work of this Government. Medical services have been decentralised. The doctor to patient ratio is improving and funding for supplies of essential drugs and consumables have been increased. All Health facilities will be equipped with modern state-of-the-art technology and equipment to support the delivery of health care.

Madam Speaker, we have entered into Public Private Partnership (PPP) to develop, upgrade, equip and operate the Ba and Lautoka Hospitals to raise the quality of health services, to meet full international standards without extra costs to Fijians.

Madam Speaker, from the way SODELPA campaigned, no one would be surprised by what they say to get ahead at this point. While I was in shock, I was still appalled to hear the Opposition talking about the PPP that has been planned by Government alongside Australia-based Aspen Medical, claiming it as some kind of international debt trap that would increase poverty. And just yesterday, the Honourable Attorney-General pointed out that the rumours spread before the Elections were far worse – that a visit to one of the newly renovated, state-of-the-art hospitals in Ba or Lautoka would result in a deadly injection from the Chinese. I would laugh at something so ridiculous but I cannot find humour in anything that threatens the health of our people.

Let me speak for a moment, not as a Member of Parliament, Madam Speaker, but as a doctor. The health of Fijians should be above cheap political tricks and dirty lies. The confusion spread by the Opposition may win the votes but the paranoia they sow about the PPP is dangerous like a disease. Make no mistake, if a patient thinks twice about visiting one of these innovative new medical facilities

because of the fear instilled by the Opposition, it could literally cost them their lives. As representatives of the Fijian people, we need to rise above the fear-mongering for their health and the health of our nation.

Madam Speaker, the truth is this: the PPP will come at no additional cost to the patient or the Fijian taxpayer, and will incur absolutely no debt to Government. That is not the way these partnerships work. In fact, it is just the opposite. The project has leverage local investment from Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) and foreign investment from private sector to construct and equip the facilities. This will actually free up taxpayer funds to be invested in other priorities in the health sector and elsewhere.

Fiji, Madam Speaker, has access to world class modern facilities with more comfortable treatment. You will have access to innovative treatments like 24 hours a day, 7 days a week heart surgery for the very first time in Fijian history. The essential health care workers at the hospitals will have access to new training opportunities with new equipment and a better working environment and hundreds of thousands of Fijian mothers, fathers, grandparents, children and newborns will stand to benefit. Madam Speaker, we will be looking at the accessibility and affordability of medical care through incentives of private General Practitioners (GPs) and improving the free medicine scheme.

Madam Speaker, let me assure our partners that we will not implement these initiatives in isolation. We will consult with all stakeholders and collaborate with them to ensure that everyone is on the same page to achieving universal health coverage

Madam Speaker, we remain committed to continue to improve health care for our mothers and children. We are not forgetting all sectors of the community, upgrading maternity services like in the Makoi Maternity Unit, which is delivering a high quality low-risk developing a delivery service in a highly populated area in Fiji. Work has already begun on the new extension at Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital that will house 200 new beds in a facility that will deliver a complete package of coordinated case specifically designed for women. This will be the first of its kind anywhere in Fiji and built to international standards.

New subdivision hospitals will be constructed and existing ones will be upgraded. These include the upgrading of Valelevu Health Centre and the completion of my mother's hospital, the Navosa Subdivision Hospital. Health Centres will be built in new areas on the upgrading of the Labasa Hospital.

Madam Speaker, I will take the lead role in tackling Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) in our country, adopting a multi-sectorial approach through better health education, production and adequate supply of fresh foods and vegetables. There will be greater collaboration and partnerships with the private sectors, NGOs and the development partners.

Madam Speaker, as the newly appointed Minister for Health and Medical Services, I am aware of the great expectations the people of Fiji have with the Ministry and I pledge them absolute commitment to improve our services delivery in Fiji for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I have already laid down the challenge to all staff in the Ministry for hard work, dedication and professionalism in all that they do to give all Fijians the best service possible.

Madam Speaker, I worship in a small Pentecostal Church and I thank my Senior Pastor, Toutou Jo Tamani for praying for the will of God before Elections.

Madam Speaker, with all due respect, Honourable Vosanibola's good wife who is here and my family, we worship in this church and we do so with pride because it is protected under the 2013 Constitution. If they say "small church", but it cannot be marginalised.

All along, Madam Speaker, our senior pastor never preached or prophesied which party will win. All he would say is "Mr. Vosanibola and Dr. Waqainabete, they are standing for the Elections, let us pray for them so they will have seats." We have seats. He also said, "Let us pray for them that God's will, will happen."

Madam Speaker, there have been many prophecies. There have been many visions, many have prayed but God has answered all our prayers. The make-up of this august House is the answer to all our prayers. God has declared His will, Madam Speaker, and the will of God is for us to govern and for SODELPA and NFP to stand on the other side.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the supporters and voters. My relatives of Bemana, my island of Moala, Qauia Village, Nagonenicolo villages - Nasalia, Nakida, Waibalavu and Nakorosule; my many students and their families; my patients and their families; my colleagues, the hard working doctors of Fiji and most of all, Madam Speaker, my family. Miriama, my wife, is here, a true Koicolo from Navucu in Nakorosule, a warrior at heart, and my children: Roko Tukana; Talei and Roko Sau and Bainivalu.

I also like to thank my family, my late mother, my father and Nene Bou; my siblings, Senileba Levaci and family; Vilimoni and Roko Senirewa; Adi Maibole and Paula and Jiaoji, my youngest brother. My father-in-law who is here today is a *Batileka* of Navucu and Nakorosule. Mr. Meli Sonokonoko campaigned for me in the Nagonenicolo *Tikina*. As a father-in-law and a *Bati*, he respected my decision even though he was a SODELPA diehard before, and wholeheartedly supported our FijiFirst Party. Madam Speaker, I hope in the next Elections, he and Honourable Gavoka (where is he?) will be the two proud fathers-in-law campaigning and sitting on this side.

Madam Speaker, any prayerful Christian must accept the will of God and FijiFirst carries, not only the voters' mandate, but the mandate of God to govern and all must accept God's will.

Madam Speaker, our daughter, two months ago, with all due respect, gave us our greatest gift, the birth of our first grandchild. Miriama Lesieli Adi Waqainabete is a Fijian who is part-European, part-Rotuman and part *i Taukei*, with heritage from right across our multi-ethnic and diverse population.

During the campaign, Madam Speaker, I was branded as a traitor. The same words were used in this Parliament yesterday, I was branded as a traitor.

When we talk about relationships, this is me. I am from Tovata, my mother is from Burebasaga, I am married to Kubuna. When we talk about land, this is me: I have land in Tovata (in Moala), I have land in my mother's village of Navosa, and already my wife is planting and we are thinking of leasing land up in Naitasiri. So, I have land in Tovata, Burebasaga and also in Kubuna.

So, when we talk about *i Taukei*, I am the *i Taukei*. When we talk about service, I serve. When people are still sleeping, I am awake. I do not only talk, I go and touch them, look after them, take them to theatre wherever I need to be able to provide that service. To be branded a traitor, Madam Speaker, was very difficult for me to accept. My son, who is six feet four, as dark as night, was told in New Zealand that he is a son of a traitor, I cannot be that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, even though I am an *i Taukei*, of an *i Taukei*, I am first and foremost a Fijian and because of Miriama who has multiple heritage, I would champion equality.

God bless you, Madam Speaker, God bless all the Honourable Members, and God Bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon the Honourable Acting Prime Minister to give the right of reply.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, a point of order!

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I seek your ruling. Standing Order 64(3) to me, very clearly says that the Honourable Prime Minister has the Right of Reply, not him, and I seek a ruling on that. I seek a ruling on Standing Order 64(3), it says "the mover of the motion." He did not move the motion; can I have a ruling on that, please?

HON. SPEAKER.- We have a provision for the Acting Prime Minister and therefore,

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Acting Prime Minister did not move the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- We have a provision for Acting Prime Minister, and we have approved that the Acting Prime Minister will present the right of reply today.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I started to think if Honourable Nawaikula was my lawyer, what would happen?

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to deliver my right of reply in my capacity as Acting Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech. Madam Speaker, as anyone who knows His Excellency the President would know that he is a man who is fair, a man who actually believes in common and equal citizenry and a man in his role as the Head of State knows that in his mandate, his objective is to ensure we have a unified Fiji.

Having worked with him as a Minister in Cabinet and having attended international meetings with him, I know that His Excellency is a man of integrity and a true statesman, who puts Fiji first. Even Honourable Tikoduadua states in his speech that he actually believes him. Therefore, if he sees any force of division and disunity, it is his prerogative to bring back to the attention of our country, to our citizens and those who are actually creating disunity. To try and subtly undermine his authority, undermine his integrity, Madam Speaker, is an affront to the Office of the President, an affront to this highly respectable and dignified human being and statesman.

Madam Speaker, in my maiden speech, I had expressed my dissent with the unfortunate personal attacks coming from those on the opposite side, the shenanigans that have taken place inside and outside Parliament, the attempts by many to gain, polarise, and divide this country along ethnic lines.

Madam Speaker, but I am not going to personalise things, I can go on about what happened in 1988 when we were arrested, but I do not come here, like Honourable Bilitavu, to lament about a torn blanket that he was given in a lockup. I can tell you that we were locked up in 1988 and when we asked for blankets, they gave us blankets in which they urinated upon. When we started singing the national anthem, they brought the Renault Trucks and started revving the engines so our voices could be drowned and carbon monoxide could fill up our cells. I can tell you that we were there with some Catholic Priests, academics, members of the NGOs, arrested for holding up a banner, Madam Speaker,

that said, "There is only race and that's the human race", and that was in Sukuna Park. We, of course, were arrested for that.

I can tell you that we were charged for holding a gathering without a permit but in fact we actually had a permit. I can tell you many things, Madam Speaker, but I am not here to cry about myself. We are here about Fiji, Madam Speaker, we are here about creating a Fiji that is inclusive, a fair, just, moral society that should not shun or be judgmental of all individuals, including Honourable Lynda Tabuya, for her dress she wears in Parliament. That is her right. She is to be judged on the content of her character, content of her input in this Parliament, not some outward manifestation of the supposed right cultural practices by someone.

Madam Speaker, there is a lot of talk about ethnicity and protection of group rights.

Madam Speaker, Mick Beddoes, of course, who now works for SODELPA, in the video that I have talked about Honourable Bulanauca, says:

"I think as far as I am concerned, indigenous rights as I see it really is a struggle of minority indigenous people in countries where they have been marginalised, and I feel that this particular situation does not necessarily apply to Fiji."

Madam Speaker, this is what identification based on ethnicity does. It is precisely the devil that Durutalo talked about when I quoted him yesterday. The whole purpose, Madam Speaker, of ethnic politics is that when you homogenise people, you will always have those that will always head those ethnic groups and these are the elites in the privileged class will also neglect intra and inter group injustices.

As Epeli Hau'ofa, a well-known sociologist said, and I quote:

"As part of the process of integration in merging the new societies, the privileged who can afford to tell the poor to preserve their traditions but their perceptions of which traits of traditional culture to preserve are increasingly divergent from those of the poor because in the final analysis, it is the poor who have to leave out their traditional culture. The privileged can merely talk about it and they are in a position to be selective about what trait they use or more correctly urge others to observe."

Madam Speaker, the reality is that the great leaders of NFP, of course, no longer exist in NFP, have said, and I quote A.D. Patel: "Won't it be better if we thought lesser of our race and more of our nationality?"

Madam Speaker, the reality is that, the Opposition has brought about, again, and reduced all our discussions and arguments based on ethnicity and the so-called divide.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who I actually congratulated for his speech, because he wants to work together and follow the rule of law, however, I did say to him that when he mentioned that he wants his supporters to remain calm and restraint, was inappropriate and indeed unwarranted. This sub-text of threats and violence must stop!

Indeed, even Honourable Aseri Radrodro wade in. Why are supposed lack of calm and lack of restraint being talked about? If you are challenging the Election results, challenge it on the legal basis, where it will be decided by any independent Judiciary.

Like anyone else and any other citizen, you and all of us have to accept the results. If we are to work together and if we are indeed genuine about it, genuine about the rule of law, then stop the threats. Actively tell your supporters not to even contemplate destruction to the rule of law or constitutional governance. Tell them to stop the vitriol and racism on social media.

I hope it will not mean that just because you do not like the results, you will undermine the institution that can give you the results. Indeed, as shown, Madam Speaker, this will result in inconsistency and hypocrisy, as seen yesterday. Honourable Bulanauca called the 1997 Constitution put in place by Satan, yet today he finds the 1997 Constitution acceptable.

This type of inconsistency, Madam Speaker, is also, unfortunately, the characteristic of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. He has given five or six different reasons at different points in time as to why he did what he did in 1987. In fact, he is also on record for saying that in 1987, Fiji was not ready for an "Indian Prime Minister", in his words. Madam Speaker, Dr. Bavadra was, in fact, an *i Taukei* from Viseisei Village that is said to be the first landing of the *i Taukei* in Fiji.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition in 2006, Madam Speaker, stated that all *i Taukei* land should be nationalised and the chiefly system abolished, and there is an article here. In other words, Madam Speaker, what he said, "Government should own all the land". This, we understand, of course, is no longer his position; this, we understand many on his side oppose also, but that is the level of inconsistency, Madam Speaker.

Our leader, Madam Speaker, on the hand, has always viewed the ownership of the *i Taukei* land sacrosanct. We effectively have closed down all ability to convert *i Taukei* land to freehold as was done in Denarau and Momi.

Madam Speaker, as Honourable Vuniwaqa has highlighted and I find it extremely astounding that the SODELPA Members are now defending the permanent alienation of *i Taukei* land. If, Madam Speaker, the Opposition Members were honest, they would know and tell themselves and all those who they are hoodwinking, that the very essence of communal ownership of land is to safeguard its ownership not just for now, but for the future generations. Again, as Honourable Vuniwaqa highlighted, land is used for cultural purposes and various rituals.

So, Madam Speaker, because the Opposition did it, is it okay? Is it justifiable? Can you imagine, Madam Speaker, if we had done it or more importantly the wrong Government did it, all hell would break loose.

Madam Speaker, even from an economic perspective, it does not make sense. By agreeing to permanently alienate these lands, they essentially sent a message to investors that *i Taukei* lease land is not worth in value. If they had started promoting *i Taukei* land as secure investment, then today the landowners would have received a windfall.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what we are doing today, Madam Speaker. We are paying for the development of the *i Taukei* land, we are telling investors, "You invest in *i Taukei* land, you pay a fair market rent and you will receive a secure investment."

Madam Speaker, then the Honourable Nawaikula said that ethnicity was a core identity supposedly informed by the United Nations. This is furthest away from the truth, Madam Speaker. If the Honourable Nawaikula were true, then we would have the Universal Declaration of Ethnic Rights, not the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We have Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Madam Speaker. Most fundamental international conventions as the Universal Human Rights is based on canonical impetus. It stems from the belief that we are all God's children, no one is more equal than the other. Even Honourable Tikoduadua in his maiden speech in 2014 said, and I quote:

“No matter what your background or religion, we are all equal in the eyes of God. In contrast to the Christian fundamentalists opposite us, our belief of Christianity is an inclusive one.”

Madam Speaker, while I am not here to proselytise or preach, as I do not wear my belief on my sleeve and pull it out whenever politically or self-interestedly convenient. I will refer to religion today but very briefly.

Madam Speaker, when God created us, He created us the same inside, only outwardly, we may look different, to the extent, Madam Speaker, even our blood is the same. There is no such thing as *i Taukei* blood or Indo-Fijian or half cast blood, or as some have called me and my children “*kawa ca*”.

Madam Speaker, as Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu would attest, Honourable Dr. Govind would attest and the Honourable Minister for Health, Honourable Dr. Waqainabete will tell us, we give blood to each other based on the blood grouping - AB, AB and O. We donate each other blood everyday. If the Honourable Minister Akbar's blood group may not be the same as mine, but could be the same as Honourable Lalabalavu. If that were, she can give him blood and he can give her blood.

Madam Speaker, of course, on the same tone, I am a universal donor so I can give blood to all of you. You can take all my blood.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the reality is this, in that, God has sent us a message and if we are wise, we will wise up to it.

Madam Speaker, a lot has been said about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). We have responded to this on a number of occasions. The indigenous experience in Fiji is remarkably different to the indigenous experience in many parts of the world. For example, in Australia, where they went shooting them as sports after Church, where they were not counted as human beings until the late 1960s. Others had land taken away from them arbitrarily, their cultural practices banned. This is the ambit under which UNDRIP had its genesis in and from, not from the indigenous Fijian experience.

The African Commission on Human Rights, Madam Speaker, has observed that any incorrect obstruction of indigenous rights would lead to the tyranny of the majority over the minority. Madam Speaker, the reality is this: they have also said that the strict definition of indigenous right is neither necessary nor desirable.

Madam Speaker, the rights of the indigenous people in Fiji, who are mainstream, are not being infringed. The Constitution protects their land, their culture, customs and tradition. They have access to the courts, the legal system, the political system, therefore, what we are saying is that, to use UNDRIP incorrectly and in particular, politically to trample the rights of others, is incorrect.

Madam Speaker, I know Honourable Nawaikula keeps on talking about the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC). Madam Speaker, the non-congregation of the GCC does not mean that chiefs are not in Fiji. The chiefs are here, the chiefs are everywhere, the chiefs are installed, the chiefs are respected. We

even have chiefs in this Parliament, however, Madam Speaker, the GCC was a colonial concoction, and let me remind him and Honourable Members of this Chamber, how foreign and fickle this organisation was.

Madam Speaker, in France, the charter of the land is seminal work on what happened in the colonial Fiji. It said that whatever outward semblance of traditional indigenous system Gordon's native administration possessed to European observers, Fijians (meaning *i Taukei*), clearly regarded it as an important institution, directly under the control of the Governor. The *Roko*, not only bore a title strange, he was quite plainly a civil servant being described in the Native regulations as the deputy of the governor in each several province, and appointed by him to rule and govern the native population.

The high chiefs rarely met in council until the important institutions of government required them to do so. The Council of Chiefs were directly subject to Gordon's authority. Gordon demonstrated on one occasion the despotic nature of his relationship with the Council by threatening to dissolve it and never call another, on hearing that some of its members were drunk.

Madam Speaker, I ask the Opposition Members, please, get out of your siege mentality, get out of your negativity. Focus on the betterment of all our people in a tangible manner.

Madam Speaker, let me give one example of the siege mentality. One of the SODELPA stalwarts, who is unfortunately in hospital and I wish him a speedy recovery, claimed on social media that the indigenous brain was not as highly developed as those, in his words, the Chinese and Indians because of their thousands of years of civilisation. Madam Speaker, this is an insult and an affront to the *i Taukei* people, in particular the young *i Taukei* people.

The *i Taukei* people are just as intelligent as anyone else. No one ethnic group has exclusivity over intelligence. Madam Speaker, I can tell you, for example, with all of our combined efforts, we cannot overcome the prowess of my brother-in-law who is fantastic in maths. No one can beat him. Honourable Gavoka, who is unfortunately not here, knows the members of our family who are recipients of Toppers and one of them had a perfect GPA and she is an *i Taukei*.

Focus on how, Madam Speaker, we can work together to come up with solutions and ideas to combat the challenges and, indeed, embrace opportunities of a modern nation State in a globalised world. To survive in a globalised world, Madam Speaker, we need to think beyond ethnicity, we need to have an open mind, stop being hypocritical, look to the future.

Madam Speaker, I find it amusing that they criticise the hiring of expatriates for our Civil Service, yet, they are quite happy to have Mr. Ben Ryan as a rugby coach, Mr. Gareth Baber as a Rugby Coach, Ms. Vicky Wilson as the Netball Coach, Christophe Gamel as Football Coach, John McKee as our 15s Coach. The point I am making, Madam Speaker, is that the best person must be hired for the job to get the best results, an output for that organisation, for the stakeholders' benefit and get the best return on their investment. As the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua remarked in 2014, and I quote him again:

“It is not true that expatriates have taken over the jobs of qualified Fijians in our economy in which we need the best people to take Fiji forward. We will not force the pace of globalisation, if it means degrading our capability as a nation.”

Madam Speaker, as I have said and I will take the religious perspective on certain things today, I believe the fact that SODELPA has 21 seats and FijiFirst has 27 seats, is God's will. I also believe there is a design in this outcome, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in the lineup of SODELPA, there are group of Honourable Members who perhaps, they may be seen as representing the most extreme views in racial ethnic policies or they may consider right doing this.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition justified these *coups* on the basis of ethnicity. They are all here. They, Madam Speaker, will be revealed to the voters in the next four years in respect of their competency. And the fact that ethnic politics has no place in a modern nation State, that ethnic politics only create division and economic chaos.

Even the insidious reflections of Honourable Qereqeretabua regarding some tourism Fiji star, who unfortunately whether deliberately or not deliberately misquoted or translated the translation of toilet in the *i Taukei* language. Immediately, they were on social media, immediately they got into it and some person writes, "If it had been anything about this *ravoravo* rebel, if it had been anything about Islam, the person who would have been charged and sent to jail is Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, but this is the insult we are faced with".

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- A Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to raise a Point of Order. I think the Honourable Member is imputing and has already called me "racist" in the media. I would like to ask if he could, please, contextualise and also speak about the whole ...

HON. MEMBER.- What is the point of order?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Standing Order 62(1), Honourable Members. If I may, Honourable Speaker, I have a screenshot as well.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Point of Order should only be very short, in one or two sentences. In fact, your Point of Order is not a Point of Order because you are referring to the content of his speech and not on the rules of Parliament as Point of Order is on the rules of Parliament.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I did not call her a "racist". I just read out, this *Ravoravo* Rebel said that, "If it had been anything about this *ravoravo* rebel, if it had been anything about Islam, the person who would have been charged and sent to gaol ...", and I hope I get enough time about this because of interruptions, "but this is the insult we are faced with ..., Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua agree ..."

Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that, this kind of insidious speaking of this way of ethnic racialised religious thinking, but let us move away from this, Madam Speaker.

Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua yesterday stated in her opening remark, there is also only about 500,000 indigenous Fijians or thereabout; she is true. But, Madam Speaker, she failed to mention that they have full protection under the Constitution; she failed to mention that there is far less number of Fiji Hindi speakers; far less number of people who were brought to this part of the world as slaves, cloaked under the guise of indenture system and these descendants have no other home other than Fiji, Madam Speaker. They are far less in number.

Madam Speaker, this is not a numbers' game. Do not play ethnic politics, Honourable Qereqeretabua! The founders of your Party did not. Do not preface on environmental topics with ethnic politics.

Madam Speaker, we welcome His Excellency's call for all of us to work together. Indeed, that has been the call of our Honourable Prime Minister. I also welcome the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who wants to work with us. Let us do so, but in order to do so we have to deal with the facts.

Madam Speaker, now on the economy, as I was saying about the economy, we, of course, are dealing with nine years of unprecedented growth. My plea to the other side of the House if you are genuine Honourable Leader of the Opposition, if you and your Members and some of them are a bit hard to control in that respect, if you are genuinely want to work together for the betterment of this country and for all Fijians, we have to treat all of them equally and work together. If you want to work together then you need to accept, recognise and embrace the facts: It is not true to say that unemployment is the highest it has ever been, Honourable Bulitavu (he is not there). The fact is, it is the lowest it has been in 20 years.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is not true to say that there are more people living in poverty, in fact, there are less compared to what was 10 years ago.

It is not true to say that the Constitution does not protect the sacrosanct communal ownership of land, it does and it is unprecedented. It is not true to say that the economy did better in the SVT Government, it did not, it does now.

Madam Speaker, despite the shenanigans of the other side, we have always entertained the individual Members, we always talk and communicate. I have been approached by Members on the other side like yesterday at lunch time, and was asked about various issues. We work with them, we provide the service, we give them information, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, the economy is doing well. We, of course, have had to deal with many of the issues that came from the past and by having the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in Parliament now, it gives us also the benchmark that we can compare the results of the economy, now compared to what it was like when he was the Prime Minister.

Let us deal with the complaints and issues, let us not fight over them, otherwise we will be doing so for the next four years. Let us work together to get rid of ethnic politics, let us not grandstand, let us unmask our own selves, do not be selective what you choose to regurgitate, Honourable Tuisawau, let go of prejudices. Prejudice, Madam Speaker, exists on all sides. The Indo-Fijians were prejudiced, the *i Taukei* were prejudiced, there are lots of other people who were prejudiced; let us work together to get rid of prejudices, Madam Speaker. Let us be consistent in our messaging, do not chop and change your values and principles. Be principled, do not lie, act with dignity, do not obfuscate, be honest and let us work together for our voters, Madam Speaker.

Let us tell our religious leaders to pray for the will of God and not use the pulpit for one's political agenda. Let us all come together with clean hearts and open minds, not only through lips, one does not become closer to God just by standing next to the cleric or saying "Amen" loudly, Madam Speaker. Let us expand our knowledge and get enlightened and understand each other, let us build Fiji for all Fijians, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as His Excellency said, and I quote:

“In our 48 years as an independent nation, only for these past four years have we lived in a nation governed by our true democracy. And those four years all rank among the very greatest in our entire history. You see it as well as I do. The relationship between genuine democracy and prosperity is crystal clear. Our challenge is to make the next four years even greater, even more successful for our country. Four years on from now, let us all aspire to represent the Fiji that is stronger, more vibrant and more prosperous and a people who remain united, committed to a common purpose and filled with true love for all their fellow Fijians and their nation. That is what true patriotism is all about.”

Madam Speaker, if I could, on a religious note, also say one thing before I finish off. Madam Speaker, my grandfather, Bakar Ali, who, most people in Nadroga know as “Bavu” (Honourable Kuridrani knows Bavu). Madam Speaker, one thing he always told me as a young kid, he said “Aiyaz, always remember once a day at least that you can die tomorrow.” He said, “If you remember that every day, it will teach you not to take this world for granted; it will teach you to love the people next to you even stronger because you may not be there tomorrow; it will teach you to respect people around you; it will teach you not to take people for granted.

It would also mean, Madam Speaker, that we all need to be a lot more humble and have humility because after all, we will be judged by our deeds here. We will be judged when we go into our graves and that is ultimately what matters, Madam Speaker. If we are able to seek that very fundamental principle of knowing that we will be held accountable for what we are doing today, it will make us a lot better person.

Madam Speaker, I wish to wish you and your family and the Parliamentary Secretariat, a fantastic Christmas and a wonderful New Year. I also wish the Honourable Prime Minister, who will be in freezing Poland very soon, and will be joined by our Honourable Climate Champion, a fantastic Christmas too.

I wish the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and his family a Merry Christmas and a fantastic new year. I would like to wish all the Members of this Parliament and your family members a very Merry Christmas and, of course, a very safe and a prosperous New Year. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The question is:

That this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his Most Gracious Speech.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

BILLS – FIRST READING

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, we have been supplied with the Bills, which are Bill No. 21 of 2016 – the Adoption Bill; and Bill No. 22 of 2016 – the Code of Conduct Bill, but I seek a ruling on Standing Order 97, paragraph 2 that these Bills have lapsed and cannot be restored. We have to start all over again.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Read the Bills!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Start all over again. That is 22(16).

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, you have got the wrong ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Unless I have a different copy.

(Laughter)

What I have here are Bill No. 21 of 2016 and Bill No. 22 of 2016, same heading, it should be 2018. Where is it?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We do not have a copy. I seek a ruling.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then how can you table something that you do not have?

(Laughter)

Give me a copy then.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will give you a copy.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Give me a copy now; table it. So, what is the allocated number?

(Laughter)

What is the allocated number? It must have a number, like No. 1 of 2018.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. The Bill is now being tabled in compliance with the Standing Orders.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Get a copy.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Later?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the Honourable Member has forgotten the procedures.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 84, I move that the following Bills be read a First Time:

1. Adoption Bill 2018
2. Code of Conduct Bill 2018
3. Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the three copies of the Bills to the Secretary-General.

SECRETARY GENERAL.-

1. A Bill for an Act to provide for local and inter-country adoption of children and access to information regarding adoption and for related matters (Bill No. 32 of 2018);
2. A Bill for an Act to establish a Code of Conduct and for other matters as prescribed under Section 149 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (Bill No. 33 of 2018);
3. A Bill for an Act to provide for the establishment of a register of Sex Offenders, the registration and reporting obligations of Sex Offenders and for related matters (Bill No. 34 of 2018).

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 84, the Bills have been read a First Time. The Bills will now, by leave of the House, be listed for Second Reading.

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General to move the Second Reading.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker pursuant to Standing Order 85, I move that the following Bills be read a second time:

1. Adoption Bill 2018;
2. Code of Conduct Bill 2018; and
3. Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Before I call upon the mover of the motion, I remind Honourable Members that pursuant to Standing 85(1), the debate should be on the principles and merits of the Bills. Further, the only amendment permitted is an amendment moved pursuant to Standing Order 85(2). Additionally, Honourable Members are reminded that you can only speak once and for 20 minutes only. I trust that this is clear.

I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General, to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a clarification: do I speak for 20 minutes on all the three Bills?

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to allay the fears of Honourable Nawaikula, he is right that these Bills were presented in the last Parliament and obviously, by law, it has now lapsed. So, we now need to re-introduce it and obviously this is why it has been given a new Bill number and you will find it there.

Madam Speaker, the first Bill is the Adoption Bill. Essentially, Madam Speaker, it is a very important Bill. As a result of the review of the Adoption of Infants Act 1944, Madam Speaker, by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation with the assistance of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), consultants were held with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and the Department of Social Welfare, including the National Co-ordination Committee on Children, which apart from Government representatives also consist of representatives from the Fiji Law Society, Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission and Save the Children Fund.

Consultations were also held, Madam Speaker, with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Office of the Solicitor-General.

By way of background, Madam Speaker, and I will quickly go through this because this will be referred to the Committee, the Act is an Act of 1944, regulates all matters pertaining to adoption including its procedures and processes.

However, the Act is outdated. In other words, it is 74 years old and does not comprehensively cater for the changing nature of adoption which now includes inter-country adoption.

The Act focuses primarily on the court processes for approving an adoption application and does not address the adoption process as a whole such as screening of prospective adoptive parents and the matching and placement of adopted children.

Therefore in aligning with common trends with other common law countries, Madam Speaker, the Bill includes much more detail about the pre-court aspects of the adoption process and ultimately repeals and replaces the out-dated 74-year old Act:

1. Most importantly, the Bill is an essential step towards ensuring that Fiji's adoption laws are up to date and aligned with international best practices relevant and strategic enough to ensure, Madam Speaker, as much as possible that the child involved in the adoption process will not be exposed to any form of abuse later on;
2. Deter against the illegal sale and trafficking of children under the pretext of adoption; and
3. Ensure that each and every adoption facilitated by the State is in the best interest of the child involved.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, an important feature of the Bill is that it domesticates the Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of inter-country adoption which is the convention, which has been ratified by Fiji and is attached as a schedule to the Bill.

The Convention provides a guideline on how the inter-country adoption process should be managed and includes a system of checks and balances designed to provide maximum protection of children against abuses and illegal practices, the children are particularly vulnerable to, in the process of the adoption.

Madam Speaker, I am not going to go through the clauses Bill by Bill, as we have got the other three Bills that I would like to talk on.

In respect of the second Bill, Madam Speaker, which is the Code of Conduct Bill, again, this Bill has lapsed and was tabled in 2016.

Madam Speaker, this Bill relates to the provision of Section 149 of the Fijian Constitution that prescribes that, I quote:

“A written law shall—

- (a) establish a Code of Conduct which shall be applicable to the President, Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Prime Minister, Ministers, Members of Parliament, holders of offices established by or continue in existence under this Constitution or under any written law, members of commissions, Permanent Secretaries, Ambassadors or other principal representatives of the State, and persons who hold statutory appointments or governing or executive positions in statutory authorities, and to such other offices (including public officers) as may be prescribed by written law;”

Madam Speaker, essentially without having to read the entire provision of the Constitution, it provides for the Accountability and Transparency Commission to ensure that all public office holders are held accountable which means all of us, even in this Parliament, will have to ensure that we declare our interest on a yearly basis, at the very least.

It is prudent to note at this point in time, Madam Speaker, that even under the 1997 Constitution, which Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca wants back, the SVT Government, Labour Government and the SDL Government were constitutionally bound to enact legislation that gave effect to Section 156 of the 1997 Constitution. But none of those governments ever brought to Parliament a Code of Conduct Bill.

It is the FijiFirst Government that has brought in a Code of Conduct Bill to Parliament for the first time because unlike previous Governments, the FijiFirst Government believes in the democratic principles of accountability, transparency and true governance in practical terms.

Under this unprecedented Code of Conduct Bill, Madam Speaker, all public officers will be legally bound to certain codes of behaviour. If they are found to be in breach of these codes, then they have committed an offence and, Madam Speaker, again the Bill sets out various provisions there which is a very comprehensive Bill from that perspective, if we sought also a lot of consultations in.

The last Bill is the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill. Madam Speaker, you will recall those Members, even in the last Parliament, that this was tabled in March of last year but it was never debated and passed by the House. Here we are again, Madam Speaker, because our Government considers this issue as one that needs to be immediately addressed, there is an urgent need for us to intervene and create an avenue to help curtail the serious growing concern in Fiji of sex offence.

It is no surprise to any of us in this House and for many in Fiji for that matter in the most recent times, there has been, of course, a number of increase in the reports of sexual offences in Fiji, and the laws in fact create the right environment, in particular, many women who are the majority of the victims of sex offences to actually come forward.

The number of offences that have been reported and indeed where people have been charged as of 31 December, 2017 indicates that there were 227 people charged with a total of 444 separate counts of serious sexual offences. Also the youngest victim of serious sexual offences were a one-year old, a 10-month old, a one year and an 11 month old where the accused persons were their grandfather and father, respectively.

Unfortunately, for many sex offenders, Madam Speaker, they cannot be easily identified in society. There could be a stranger but that could also be a next door neighbour or an uncle or whoever it is at a family function, as they exist even in supposedly safe places like homes, schools, workplaces and community centres.

Madam Speaker, the Bill essentially establishes the register for sex offenders to help monitor sex offenders in the community and reduce potential sex offences. The Bill also requires sex offenders to report the relevant personal information about themselves for inclusion in the register. These include the names, addresses, permanent distinguishing marks, fingerprints, places of employment and physical description and registration of numbers of vehicles of sex offenders.

The sex offenders are also required to make periodic reports to ensure that their personal information in the register is current and up to date.

The rationale for requirement of registration of periodic reporting by sex offenders is as follows:

- Protecting the public from sex offenders is in governmental interest;
- Sex offenders pose a high risk of reoffending after they are released from custody;
- Registration and periodic reporting reduce the likelihood of sex offenders reoffending because they are being monitored;
- Facilitating the investigation and prosecution when feature in sexual offences; last but not least;
- The release of certain information about sex offenders to public agencies and the general public will assist them protecting public safety.

This Bill reflects the approach taken by the jurisdictions of Australia and New Zealand. When we were drafting this Bill, there have been a number of inputs, in particular, from those two countries.

Jurisdictions such as USA, for example, Madam Speaker, there are points of difference. One of the major issues from a human rights' privacy perspective, of course, which the Committee will need to look at is: do we make the list available publicly or do we actually have it in confidence and where only certain agencies have access to it.

For example, if someone has applied for a job to be a preschool teacher or a primary school teacher, does the school or the Ministry of Education have access to that list; and can they check the list before they actually recruit people? So these are the sorts of issues that the Committee needs to actually look at, because it does venture out into those individual rights areas and, of course, the Bill has certain recommendations by way of the recommended laws that have been put in place, and it gives powers, Madam Speaker, for the administration of the register. So, for example, the Commissioner of Police may authorise persons from the Fiji Police Force as well as the Fiji Correctional Services, as nominated by the Commissioner of Fiji Correction Services, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, those are my introductory remarks for the second reading of the Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The three Bills are before the House for debate and I invite input, if any, Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this stage, we are allowed only under Standing Order 85 to debate on the principles and demerits of the Bill. I know I speak for this side of the House in saying that the principles and the merits of all these Bills are positive. For example, for the Adoption Bill, those of us who go to Court know the difficulty that we face there in relation to Inter-Countries Rules on Adoption. We need that clarified as soon as possible as well as the Code of Conduct Bill that has been outstanding for we look forward to that, as well as the Sex Offenders Bill.

My view is that (and I feel that I am speaking for this side of the House), we need to approve this quickly, so that it can be allocated to the necessary Standing Committee to scrutinise the details of it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do you have any other input to this debate?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other input, I now call upon the Acting Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his input and I completely agree with him, and I am glad that he recognises the fact that these are very important Bills.

This is why we have actually reintroduced these three Bills, as we know there are many other Bills that have lapsed, but we thought that these three were very important and I look forward to the Committee coming back to Parliament as quickly as possible in the next couple of months to give their comments, so that we can actually approve a Law or these three Laws and put into effect in particular for the protection of the vulnerable in our society. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The question is:

That pursuant to Standing Order 85, the following Bills be read a second time:

1. The Adoption Bill 2018;
2. Code of Conduct Bill 2018; and
3. Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the Bills are agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.-

1. A Bill for an Act to provide for Local and Inter-Country Adoption of Children and Access to Information Regarding Adoption, and for related matters (Bill No. 32 of 2018);
2. A Bill for an Act to establish a Code of Conduct and for other matters as prescribed under Section 149 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (Bill No. 33 of 2018); and
3. A Bill for an Act to provide for the establishment of the Register of Sex Offenders, the Registration and Reporting Obligations of Sex Offenders, and for related matters (Bill No. 34 of 2018).

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 85(4), the Bills have been read a second time.

Pursuant to Standing Order 85(4)(a), the Bills are now referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Thank you, Honourable Members.

ADJOURNMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 11th February, 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is:

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 11th February, 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- Since no Member opposes, the motion is therefore agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting for this week, and I thank you all for your contributions throughout the week, and to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address, as well as the other businesses which were before the House.

For those Honourable Members living outside of Suva, I wish you safe travels to your respective homes, and I look forward to a New Year of robust and lively debates.

Honourable Members, as we enter into the festive season, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Thank you very much, and I now declare that Parliament adjourns until Monday 11th February, 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.35 p.m.