

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2019

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present except the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, Honourable A. Sayed-Khaiyum; Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu; Honourable M.R. Leawere; Honourable A.M. Radrodro and Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 6th September 2019 and Tuesday, 12th November, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's first sitting of Parliament for the 2019 to 2020 session.

I also welcome members of the public who are here in the gallery and those who are watching proceedings on television and the internet. I thank all of them for taking an interest in the proceedings of your Parliament.

Bell Timings – Response to HE's Address

For the information of Honourable Members, you have on your tables the bell timings (very important) detailing the times for the first warning bell and then the final bell.

Honourable Members, for the purposes of the responses to His Excellency's Address, Members are allowed to speak for 20 minutes. The first bell will be rung when a Member reaches 18 minutes during his or her speech and the final bell will be rung when it reaches 20 minutes. I know you are all very well aware of the timings.

Honourable Members, I trust that you will take heed of the timings. Thank you, Honourable Members.

DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Prime Minister, the Honourable Josaia Bainimarama to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Honourable Speaker, on behalf of all the Honourable Members of this Parliament, I move to thank His Excellency the President for the insight he granted us in his remarks opening this Parliamentary Session.

But first, Sir, I would like to begin by expressing my sincere condolences to our Pacific brothers and sisters in Samoa. As many of you know, Samoans are contending with an outbreak of measles which is suspected to have already claimed nine lives, mostly children under the age of two. I ask every Fijian to join me in prayer that this outbreak is quickly contained and the Samoan people are spared further loss of life.

The measles outbreak in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, remains restricted to the Serua and Namosi Subdivision. Still, I urge every Fijian family to ensure that their children are vaccinated against measles. If anyone has any doubt, please visit your nearest Health Centre with your child's health record to have it checked by a health care worker. They will be immunised on the spot if needed.

Honourable Speaker, I also wish to extend prayer to our friends in Australia and California who are living through the deadly blazes of unprecedented wild fires. To see bushfire crises of this scale so early in the fire season is extremely concerning and unfortunately due to the changing weather patterns propelled by climate change, we can only expect these disasters to become more severe and more unpredictable in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, in the week since His Excellency opened this Parliamentary Session, the pride I felt hearing him speak to the generational good of our young democracy has hardly faded. Real change is not created from a single day's work, a single piece of legislation or even a single term of Government. Deep, enduring changes in Fijian society are born in the minds of our younger citizens and nurtured over the course of generations. That is where democratic values are taking firm hold in Fijian society. Given we are such a young country, with more than half of our population under the age of 27 and 70 percent under the age of 40, that fills me with the optimism for our future.

Mr. Speaker, I hate to be the bearer of bad news but no parliamentarian in this Chamber can count themselves among the youth of this country as technically speaking youth is capped at 35. So that means not even Honourable Alvick Maharaj who just turned 36 this past August, Sorry, Honourable Maharaj, but welcome to the club.

Honourable Speaker, as elected representatives we must put ourselves in the shoes of the young people we are here to serve. We must strive to know the anxiety of Fijian children who expect to see climate impacts

intensify over the course of their entire lifetimes. We must seek to understand the many ways our secondary school students are witnessing technology re-shape our schools and our society at large. And we must endeavour to match the hunger of our young entrepreneurs to seize emerging opportunities in our growing economy. How, one might ask Honourable Speaker? Very simple, by opening our ears to what our youth have to say and by involving them in the decisions we make. I urge the Honourable Members of the Opposition to do so with urgency by actually engaging with young people, they may actually stand a chance at tethering their contributions to the realities young Fijians live every day.

Mr. Speaker, whether I am speaking with young people in their schools and communities across our provinces or standing beside them at the height of global leadership, I listen often and intently to their concerns and ideas. As far as they are concerned, an open and an inclusive democracy is not some revolutionary ideal, it is their societal baseline. They will expect nothing less in a Fiji where the votes matter equally, their voices are taken seriously and their Government positively and honestly acts to secure them new and better opportunities.

These growing national expectations are undeniable blessings. It is a blessing that so many of our children and grandchildren have only ever known a true democracy. It is a blessing they are embracing their wide array of constitutional rights and it is a blessing that they do not suffer a government who sees their worth through the lengths of ethnicity, gender, religion, physical abilities, status or province.

These fundamental truths are sparking an unprecedented civic transformation evident not only through the creativity we saw in His Excellency's "Hashtag Our Constitution Challenge". That proof, Honourable Speaker is all around us. We see it in the passion of student champions for sustainable development. We see it in the openness in which young Fijians embrace the religious and cultural celebrations of their peers. We see it in the pride of youth who are using new technology to express their views and preserve their cultural heritage. We see it in the growing sophistication of intellectual discourse, debates and discussions.

Bonded in unassailable purpose, the young Fijians driving this wave of change are forever cementing the achievement of our democracy and engraving the aspirations of our Constitution in our national consciousness.

Mr. Speaker, when my Government was busy putting in the sweat to forge our shared national identity and secure a common and equal citizenship, many in the Opposition fought us every single step of the way. Every time a wall of communal division came crashing down, they protested in bitter agony. As we improved our economy with innovative thinking and forward-looking policies, they offered nothing but non-sensical comments, half-baked alternatives and intellectual dishonesty. And as we levelled the playing field across our society, they dug lines in the sand around the old system of privilege and entitlement, all while others among them watched tight lipped in tacit compliance.

The Fijian people, Honourable Speaker, have not forgotten nor will we forget, but let me be clear with those Members opposite, those old debates are over. You cannot undo our great achievements. You cannot rob our people of their national identities. You cannot walk into a Year 6 classroom and tell those young folks, they are not all Fijians. You cannot tell our students their merit and hard work will be ignored because they do not have the right background or the right last name, the right connections, they are not from the right province or they do not have enough money. You cannot, you will not drag us back into our divisive and unequal past. Mr. Speaker, if they are not willing to acknowledge that legality they are unworthy of the seat they hold and the nation they intend to represent.

Fiji's success over this past decade has proven them wrong more powerfully than I could ever hope. We have proven that unity is not a weakness. Our common identity is not an affront to anyone; it is our people's greatest strength.

That is how we have achieved ten straight years of economic growth. That is how we have dropped unemployment to a nearly two-decade low. That is how we have taken Fiji's voice from the meekest corner of global affairs in the decades past to where we stand today, at the forefront of solving the planet's greatest challenges.

Young Fijians do not have time to waste listening to petty spats in this Chamber. They are looking forward. They want jobs. They want specialised degrees. They want to build new industries. They want access to new technology. They want to purchase homes of their own. They want to lead on climate change. They want stability. They want consistency. They want a government that cares and listens, and most importantly, a government that does not mislead them. Honourable Speaker, they want to keep our economy growing and to see their share of Fijian prosperity. Just ask any of the recipients of our Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES).

But, Mr. Speaker, it is not just about our young people. We are not serving Fijians of any age or even Fijians yet to be born, unless we heed His Excellency's apt reminder to focus on the mountain of progress we have yet to ascend.

Our climate is changing and the global economic and political uncertainties is rising. These challenges demand more than our attention. They demand we come together and bring enlightenment and innovation to the business of nation-building. To echo the words of His Excellency, we must all speak and work in the national interest, not self-interest, not party interest, but in the interest of securing Fijian wellbeing for one, two and even three generations from now.

Young Fijians share their Government's concern on these issues. It is for the sake of their future we must all bring a high-level of intellectual rigour to the debates in this Chamber, as well as make space for their voices in the decision-making table.

Among the millions of global citizens who took to the streets in the climate strike this past September, Fijian voices rang loud and clear. And I am proud to lead one of the few Governments in the world, who stood in solidarity with all those justly-frustrated with the inertia of larger economies to spare our planet from worsening climate impacts.

When Fiji showed up at the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit in New York, we came ready with world-leading commitments to step up our climate action plans. In the days prior, our youngest climate warriors took Manhattan by storm with impassioned demands and powerful testimonies that paved the way for leadership at the main event. And I would like to thank Timothy, Tyler, Komal, Ann, Maanvick and Genevieve for impressively imbuing the Youth Climate Action Summit with Fijian perspectives.

Honourable Speaker, there is no force more powerful than the unrivalled passion and energy young people supply the campaign for climate action. Their calls for action can capture the conscience of world leaders and spur positive changes like nothing else can. And Fijian youth, as frontline witnesses to the climate reality, are some of the world's most critically important climate ambassadors. The application window is now open for the youth and youth organisations to be accredited to the Fijian delegation at the COP 25 in Madrid. Details can be found on the Ministry of Economy website.

But, Mr. Speaker, our campaign to make leaders of more of our young people will mean nothing if we do not address the unfair and systemic barriers thrown in the faces of Fijian women and girls. As Prime Minister, I reaffirm my total commitment to our urgent campaign to grant every woman and girl the confidence that they are secure, the knowledge that they are valued and the foundation of education and opportunity they need to become who they strive to be.

Mr. Speaker, the empowerment of women in this country has long been stifled by a deadly culture of physical violence and gender-based discrimination. The abusers themselves are despicable, but the blame for this societal plague also falls on every man who fails to challenge patriarchal systems and uproot mentalities of male entitlement and supremacy. It is not only about the violent acts themselves, men in our society suffer from a chronic lack of awareness of the subtle, yet devastating dynamics that suppress women's voices and restrict their opportunities.

So often, Fijian men do not want to know how their decisions, their inaction and their apathy fuel this raging crisis of gender-based violence and discrimination. They make excuses, they distract from the issue, all because they fail to sympathise with and understand the very real threats and discriminating women and girls face.

The most recent loss of a four-month-old infant due to a domestic dispute was an appalling and horrific crime. Let me be clear, that men who perpetrate physical and sexual violence and who employ psychological intimidation, as well as the apologists who defend them, are all the same breed of coward.

But, Mr. Speaker, we are seeing successes. Along with critical support from our development partners and civil society, we are making life safer and more fulfilling for our mothers, our wives, our daughters, our granddaughters, nieces and all the girls and women with whom we share this nation. More victims of domestic violence are coming forward to report the abusers, many hundreds through the 24-Hour toll free Domestic Violence Helpline which we established with Government funding in 2017, and is run by the Women's Crisis Centre.

Since the introduction of Free Education, more girls are attending school, staying enrolled and entering our workforce. Thousands of women entrepreneurs have taken part in our National Women's Expo since 2014, sharing their products, connecting to markets and collaborating with their peers to translate their talents into newfound financial independence.

We have raised maternity leave to 98 working days. We are paying mothers from low-income households \$1,000 upon the birth of a child. We are providing food vouchers to rural pregnant mothers. And we are developing specialised healthcare facilities catered to women's health.

We are elevating more women to lead within our Civil Service. In my Office, Honourable Speaker, 62 percent of leadership positions are held by women. In the Attorney-General's Chambers, over 70 percent of the lawyers are women. Mr. Speaker, we all know these roles have traditionally been male-dominated.

Often times, women were not given more than a peak into these offices, but that narrative has been flipped on its head because of our commitment to and implementation of an open merit system of recruitment and advancement. Through the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS), we have forged a level playing field. Women are able to participate equally to secure jobs and are assessed on their ability to perform. Because they are finally being given equal and fair treatment, we have kicked down the door of the old boys club. This should have happened years ago, but we can all be proud that the talented Fijian women of today, as well as young people, are no longer being shut out from opportunities within the Government.

Our effort to bring women into the fold of our development, combined with the historic funding towards education, has led Fiji to field the most talented, most educated and most ambitious workforce the Pacific has never seen.

On top of that, we are embracing new technology in bringing Government services online. We are deepening financial inclusion. With 10 years of economic growth at our back we are in our strongest ever position to achieve record levels of investment, sustain and create jobs, and secure further economic development.

Global growth may well be slowing and we will surely feel the impacts, but the growth of our economy is projected to remain resilient. We are going to keep expanding. We are going to sustain and improve faith in our economic potential. We are going to keep funding ambitious ideas for new ventures. We are going to listen to Fijian business and continue to respond with reforms that keep them at home and in markets beyond our shores.

We are going to continue funding the programmes that uphold Fijian wellbeing; the free education, social welfare support, investment and resilient infrastructure, essential services, healthcare, legal aid services, our support to farmers and the incentives that accelerate Fijian business development.

Mr. Speaker, when I first became Prime Minister, I promised to build a better and more inclusive country. I promise to end the decades of division, ethnic discrimination and communalism that nearly drove our nation into the ground. I promised to end the systemic corruption that plagued our development. I promise to bring smart and strategic development to our economy, and I promise to fight every day for our future worthy of the potential of the coming generations.

Every year, more of that vision has come to pass, and our record of achievement has grown prouder. Every year, our progress has become more tangible in our people's lives. Every year, Fiji has come closer to realising our national destiny.

But that work is not over, that job is not yet done. Sustaining our prosperity demands every ounce of energy we can muster, every shred of ingenuity we can summon, and every Parliamentarian's total focus and commitment.

His Excellency was right when he told us that we are still living in the most consequential chapters of Fijian history. The coming year holds even greater significance as this session of Parliament will carry us all the way through to 10th October, 2020, the 50th Anniversary of our Independence.

Fifty years from now, in 2070, the citizens of a modern, dynamic and vibrant Fiji will look back on this period with gratitude on the long-term investments we are making in their wellbeing, and the vision we have set out for their success. I hold every confidence that because of our work today, for those future Fijians will be better, live better and dream bigger than we can possibly imagine.

Mr. Speaker, I have spent a good chunk of my time today speaking about the greatness of the next Fijian generation. So, I believe it is fitting to end my response with an announcement that next May, we will be hosting the first-ever consolidated National Youth Awards in Fijian history, awarding the achievements of young Fijians and showcasing the unmatched greatest of our human capital. I look forward to seeing and learning about the remarkable achievements of the young people of this country.

I, again, thank His Excellency for his inspiring Opening Address and for the passion he brings to the causes of greatest importance to all Fijians.

May God bless Fiji, may God bless His Excellency the President, and the Fijian people. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, before we proceed, I wish to remind Honourable Members that we will closely follow the Batting Order that has been circulated. There have been exceptions and I have taken those into account, but strictly the Batting Order is there. Thank you Honourable Members.

I now call upon the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. I rise to contribute to this debate on the motion that this House thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I send out my condolences to the *Turaga ni Yavusa of Matanikorovatu* in Kalabu, on the loss of his wife and also congratulate the Fiji 2nd Fifteens for beating the Barbarians.

(Acclamation)

Mr. Speaker, this is the 9th Session of Parliament I am in, since I became a Member in 1992, serving until May 1999 and returning in November last year. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President's Address to this Honourable House and I say "Honourable" with a lot of misgivings, is the most ungracious I have heard in the Parliament of Fiji.

Our Head of State, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our President holds the highest office in the land. The chiefs look up to him. The religious leaders look up to him. The young people look up to him. We, the leaders, look up to him.

We look up to him holding that high office, Mr. Speaker, of Head of the State because he is the fount of honour, he is the fount of authority, he is the fount of mercy. Whenever he addresses the nation, he must exude confidence, he must exude peace, he must exude comfort, he must exude hope and he must exude cheer and joy. Even if he has to be the bearer of sad tidings, he must deliver it to the people in a language and tone that forge unity and inspire confidence to mobilise the nation and its people to be bold and resolute to tackle the challenges and overcome evil and the results of misadventures, and prevail.

That is what a Head of State should do in a National Address, Mr. Speaker, and the address must be given gracefully. The Government must take responsibility for putting our Head of State into this embarrassing position of reading an address that is a poor and wrong impression of the person we have as our President.

Our President, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a decorated Military Officer, he is a former Force Commander of the then biggest United Nations Peacekeeping operations going on in the world. He was in-command of more than 10,000 military personnel and thousands of international and locally recruited civilian staff.

His Office was staffed by some of the most efficient and professional military and civilian staff especially selected by the participating countries in the United Nations. His speeches were in his own words expressing his own will and Mission and crafted by these experienced staff. They had to be couched in such a way that all Heads of States, all Heads of Governments that come with the United Nations, would continue to support the efforts of the Forces he commanded to carry out the Mandate set for it by the various United Nations Resolutions in order to restore peace in the Middle East and the world.

His addresses and Reports to the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council had to be grateful, confidence-inspiring and gracious. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Address he was made to deliver in this Honourable House on Tuesday last week, was unfit to be delivered by our Head of State, our President, who has had an illustrious career ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- ... in our own Military Forces, who has had a distinguished time of Command in the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) as its Force Commander, for which he was Honoured by two-Member Nations of the United Nations and our own College of Honour, and a former loyal civil servant of our country.

Mr. Speaker, to do justice to our Head of State, who has had a finger on the pulse of the nation for more than three decades, and is aware of the real situation on the ground and has not been hoodwinked by the Government's propaganda machine, and the Government should have given him the free hand to deliver to the nation a message he was comfortable with, delivered it from his heart as a true patriot of Fiji, on the day after the nation paid its respects to those that made the supreme sacrifice of life in the two World Wars in the Malayan Emergency and in Peacekeeping Operations around the world.

Mr. Speaker, recalling the Wreath Laying Ceremony on Remembrance Day on Monday, 11th November, 2019, I distinctly remember the following Roll of Honour read out by the President of the Returned Sailors and Ex-Servicemen's Association of Fiji:

- In World War I, of the 124 who were killed in action, died of wounds or natural causes in the theatres of War, there were 10 *iTaukei* names and the rest 114 were English or European names.
- In World War II Roll of Honour, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the 50 killed in action or died of wounds or natural causes in the War Theatre, 11 were English or European names, and the rest (39) were *iTaukei* names.
- On the Malayan Emergency Roll of Honour, of the 18 that were killed in action or died of wounds or of natural causes in the Theatre (and that included casualties to Malaria, Mr. Speaker), 3 had English or European names, 1 Maori name and the rest (14) were *iTaukei* names.
- On Peacekeeping Missions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Lebanon, MFO Sinai, UNDOF Golan Heights, UNMISSET in East Timor, UNMISS in South Sudan and the Police UN Missions in Kosovo, Namibia, Iraq and RAMSI in the Solomon Islands, two European or English names, two Indian names and the rest (16) were *iTaukei* names.
- The Fijians in the British Army Roll of Honour, there were four English names, one Indian name and the rest (43) were *iTaukei* names.

When I look around this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, Sir, only one of us has an English name or Irish name, and that is the Honourable Alexander O'Connor.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President, in his salutation, used four languages "*Bula vinaka, Namaste, Asalaam Alaykum, Noaia 'e Mauri*, and a very good morning to you all", yet, we, the Members of this House, cannot use the native Fijian language in this Chamber.

In his closing thanks, he used the same four languages, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He referred to the six-year old Shavneel Kumar, who, to use, Sir, His Excellency's own words, "unabashedly calls himself 'Fijian'". His Excellency the President was referring to our Constitution that was unilaterally decreed into force, by force on the people of Fiji. All previous Constitutions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, considered the contribution of ethnic groups in Fiji in the development, in the defence and the economy and allocated seats in Parliament to preserve the nation's respect for ethnic groups' roles in the history of our nation.

Speaking about the Constitution, His Excellency the President said, and I quote:

“ Only six short years since the launch of our 2013 Constitution, we are undoubtedly still living some of the most consequential chapters of our history. As the journeys of many of the world’s great democracies and economically powerful nations have taught us: The quality of our leadership in these formative years will be defining for our political system.”

Is the assault on the physically and visually impaired Honourable Pio Tikoduadua on Constitution Avenue, a demonstration of the quality of our leadership that will define our political system, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

His Excellency the President said, and I quote:

“4. I can recall the patriotic euphoria that gripped our nation following the successful conduct of our 2014 General Elections. I have watched with growing pride as that excitement has produced higher public expectations for the rights we enjoy, the opportunities at our disposal, the impact of our voices: at home and overseas; and the conduct of our elected leaders.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has happened to that patriotic euphoria?

The General Elections of 2018 showed the opposite of patriotic euphoria. The governing party in spite of all the “Friendly Voters friendly programmes” in six years since the Decree Promulgated Constitution lost votes in the 2018 General Elections. They lost in the winning percentage and lost on seat counts, also in spite of voters population increase by natural as well as naturalisation growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you and I and the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health, attended the Blue Breakfast in aid of the Diabetes Association of Fiji in unity with the rest of the world on World Diabetes Day, on Thursday, 14th November, 2019.

In your speech that morning, Sir, you said that 3 in every 10 people in Fiji today are living with diabetes. You said it was an alarming statistics, an alarming situation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, when 3 in every 10 voters registered to vote did not turn up to vote, it is an alarming statistics, it is an alarming situation, certainly not a ‘patriotic euphoria’.

His Excellency the President said, and I quote:

“... watched with growing pride as that excitement has produced higher public expectations for the rights we enjoy, the opportunities at our disposal ...”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, how have the excitement and higher expectations been manifested in our national life? There have been a marked increase in drug-related offences, being investigated and prosecuted, and not by the run-of-the-mill people involved in illegal cultivation and trade in marijuana, but by higher profile figures in our society. This is definitely a sure indicator of low national morale, certainly not growing pride and higher public expectations, Mr. Speaker.

The recent attacks on our Police personnel demonstrated general lack of respect for law and order and a definite sign of low national morale. Our talented rugby players, who represented us in the Rugby World Cup recently completed in Japan, showed how low national morale can reduce great talented young world-class rugby players to a low impact rugby team on the field.

The story and clippings of the Honourable Minister for Defence, Honourable Colonel Inia Seruiratu, trying to make them pay attention while presenting their jerseys that night, confirm low morale, the result of poor

management, poor coaching, poor leadership and above all, poor national leadership that has failed to give them a nation and a society that they would have felt patriotically proud to have represented and played for.

I congratulate once again the Fiji Second Team for beating the Barbarians and I pay my respect to the Captain of our team in 1970, Ratu Sela Toga who still lives in Nadi, and the others of my colleagues who went on that tour that made history by the first, to beat the Barbarians at home 29-9. This Second Team beat them again last night or the night before and I congratulate them. Mr. Speaker, His Excellency also read out these words, and I quote: "... the impact of our voices: at home and overseas;"

Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, Fiji sent a delegation to the Human Rights Council Session in Geneva, where the working group on the Universal Periodic Review Reports were tabled. The Fiji delegation was led by our Acting Chief Justice, the Honourable Justice Kamal Kumar with the Fiji's Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and Commissioner of Police among others. While Fiji agreed with many of the recommendations and findings, there was an additional 55 that Fiji had to specifically address and comply with. Many of the issues brought up by the rapporteurs that examined Fiji are issues we cannot hide, particularly from the eyes of our own people, who say, no matter how grand-sounding our delegates may be on the international stage, we in Fiji know better.

Many of the issues about our human rights, group rights, rights of detained persons, and particularly our rights as indigenous native peoples of Fiji and Rotuma, have not been fully recognised even those that do not negatively impact or impinge on the rights of all other non-indigenous persons and groups. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, "The impact of our voices at home and overseas ...", as His Excellency put it, sounds tinny and hollow. In fact, it is like Macbeth who said in one of his most studied soliloquies:

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools,
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle,
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I came into this Chamber before 9.00 o' clock on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019, to wait for the Opening and the Opening Address. While waiting, I made the following notes:

- Listen to the Address;
- What of last year's Address will be reiterated;
- What of last year's promises have been realised;
- What of last year's promises have been allocated funds in the 2019-2020 Budget;
- How much of what Opposition Members input in the year have been incorporated into Policy Statements to come from the Address;
- What is the Government's Legislative Programme for the year; and
- Prepare my response.

Mr. Speaker, there was no reference to what His Excellency said last year, to give us an indication of how much contained in that address has been answered in the past year. His Excellency did not specifically relate the promised developments to the budget for this year. None of the Opposition input into the debates in the last Session found its ways into the Address for incorporation into Government actions. He did mention that there

will be Bills brought before this Honourable House about the Climate Change Act, the Cybercrime Bill to align our national legislation with the Budapest Convention, the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998, the Excise Act of 1986, Customs Act, VAT Act and Republic of Fiji Military Forces Act 1949 and agricultural laws to ensure their effectiveness in a rapidly modernising world and avoid hiccups in service delivery.

There was a promise to continue the reforms, the reforms that we are waiting for, which means we continue to wait for the reforms.

There was a lecture on the functions of the Committees of Parliament, which we all know are not unbiased in their reporting because of the participation of Members who are part of the Executive of Government and must comply with Government Party lines, totally negating the objective of Committees which is to hear submissions, make balanced reports to the House on the merits and demerits of the proposals, Bills, Reports, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, the Address had nothing to inspire confidence in the minds of investors in Fiji who have watched their investments threatened by bad management of our economy. Our projected growth for the year was recently revised downwards again, this time to 1 percent. We hope it will not be further revised downwards to a negative figure by the end of the year. Some businesses are contracting or closing Mr. Speaker, indicating the lack of confidence in the Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- The sugar industry, Mr. Speaker Sir, continues to wallow in its own pool of mill mud, and nothing was mentioned in the Address to address this very important industry which has been the mainstay of our economy since the Colonial days.

Our crime rate and nature is worsening – the surface indication of a very fast declining national morale, in spite of freebies and handouts and the various CARE programmes.

Mr. Speaker, one of the Lectionary Readings yesterday, Sunday, 17th November, 2019 was the second epistle of Paul, Silas and Timothy to the people and the church in Thessalonica – 2 Thessalonians 3: 6 – 13 where they are urging leaders, they are urging the people to do honest work even to the extent that they propose that though they do not work, do not deserve to eat.

Before ending, Mr. Speaker, I want to send out my greetings to Mr. and Mrs. Ashok Prasad of B. Prasad & Sons of Fletcher Road, Vatuwaqa. Mrs. Shrimati Prasad celebrated her birthday on Saturday and she was very happy to welcome home for the celebration two of their daughters living successfully in New Zealand. Mr. and Mrs. Prasad are devout Hindus who follow the teachings of Jesus Christ better than most Christians. Their special and honoured guests on Saturday night, as have been in all their celebrations including Diwali were the children from the Fiji Society for the Blind in Vatuwaqa. Congratulations Mrs. Shrimati Prasad and thank you for demonstrating the kind of love we must all strive to show. As Jesus said: “When you do these to one of the least in my Kingdom, you do them for me”.

Congratulations Mrs. Prasad on your birthday, and congratulations to the Prasad family for being gracious hosts and for being gracious about life.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government has not been gracious. Our Government has been failing the people of Fiji. I call on the Prime Minister to do the Honourable thing, if he can find it in himself and resign ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- ... advice His Excellency the President to call for fresh elections so that the people of Fiji can give a fresh mandate to its representatives to bring this country and its people out of the political doldrums and the economic dump we are in and we stand on. They have mismanaged the economy. They have frustrated the Police. They have frustrated the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and embarrassed our President by giving him an Address that he should never have been given.

With these words, Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that the Address was not a gracious one and as a true patriot of Fiji, I must not and will not agree with the motion before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Acclamation)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! After a speech and the speaker is about to take the floor, no comments from anyone. You all know the procedures and the protocols. I do not want to remind Members again.

I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his contribution to the debate. I now call on the Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs, the Honourable Selai Adimaitoga. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Thank you, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Members of this august Parliament, ladies and gentlemen present in the visitors' gallery, *ni sa bula vinaka, namaste* and a good morning to you all.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise today in support of the opening Address by the Fijian President, His Excellency Jioji Konrote which opened Parliament 2019. Fiji is a great nation. We are unique in so many ways. For one, we have managed to coexist as brothers and sisters for decades and grown to appreciate our unique cultures and people. As His Excellency ...

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Listen.

(Laughter)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- ... said in his opening Address, six years ago we were blessed with the 2013 Fijian Constitution. Finally, Fiji saw all her people recognised as Fijians.

In 2013, we had a just Constitution. In 2014, the FijiFirst Party won a landslide victory in the National Elections. This victory was significant in many ways. The Government has done so much yet it is not recognised by the other side of the House. For one, it showed the good nature ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- ... love and unity of Fijians. Only one year after the Constitution called us all Fijians, it was endorsed by this victory.

Peter 3:8 says and I quote, "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble". We are all children of God and this will never change. Furthermore, it showed the support that people have for what is good and just. The second victory in 2018 was an honour, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It showed that a majority of Fijians still support our policies and our Prime Minister's vision for the future. This vision includes ensuring that every single Fijian child has access to education. Honourable Speaker, Sir, how I wish I had free education in my time. The opportunities, especially by the young ones, who do not remember life before Honourable Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama, not only are fees paid but we also provide bus fare and text books. Why is this important? It is because ensuring that every Fijian child gets an education means that they will have a better life, better opportunities and better jobs. Most importantly, able to contribute to Fiji. Right now, I see many Members on the other side taking advantage of our youths and spreading misinformation and hate against us. I would like to humbly request you to please stop.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- We have had enough of old style of politics. Fiji cannot afford to be caught in the cycle again. The message you are spreading is causing division, the likes of which we have not seen since the lead up to the 1987 and 2000 *coups*.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Listen!

To all Fijians watching, whether on *Facebook* live stream or television, I would first of all like to congratulate you on completing your exams and I will speak from experience. Please do not listen to anything that you read on social media. Please do not take for granted the things that are given to us. There was no free education in my day.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Not anymore.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- You listen, I am talking to the Honourable Speaker.

There was no free education in my day. I did not have the opportunities that you do. I am talking to the children, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There was no Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS). After high school, if one could not afford to get a scholarship one had no choice but to turn to unskilled work. There was no minimum wage protecting you either from exploitation. If you were not related to a chief, you could not get a scholarship.

Our Prime Minister changed this. He allowed ordinary Fijians to access the taxpayer's money which was previously reserved for the elite. It saddens to me to see how he is being treated online. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is committed to fulfilling our mandate and serving the people of Fiji. Our grassroot programmes not only reach Fijians in urban areas but also in remote rural villages and maritime islands.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, never before in the history of our country have landowners benefited as such a high level from their land.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Do not mislead us.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- I am not misleading, Mr. Speaker, I am telling the truth. Pine owners for example just received \$7 million payout. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a record. I have seen Honourable Niko

Nawaikula make all sorts of claims on *Facebook* that somehow we are against the indigenous Fijians or the *iTaukei*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can I please ask her to retract it? She is misleading the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula, she is making her contribution to the President's Address. You have the floor.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- *Dabe*, sit down.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Thank you, Sir. This is perhaps one of the biggest political lies that SODELPA is using to remain relevant.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very poor.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Let me point out, Honourable Nawaikula that you are insulting every single intelligent *iTaukei* leader that have ever existed by saying such comments. Comments like this suggest that *iTaukei* need extra help to be able to succeed.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order. The word that is used is unparliamentarily.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjections)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- She is saying that I am misleading the public.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- (Inaudible interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Prove it!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have made your Point of Order. I have asked her to take heed of that. You have the floor.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Let me point out that you are insulting every single intelligent *iTaukei* leader that has ever existed by saying such comments.

Comments like these suggest that *iTaukei* need extra help to be able to succeed. This is far from the truth. All around the world we have successful stories of smart *iTaukei* leaders; women and men who have gone through the same struggles and come out victorious.

Secondly, every *iTaukei* child is like every other child who has access to all benefits.

Free education, the FijiFirst Government has educated more *iTaukei* children than the other side ever could in their time. What about Fijian villages? The FijiFirst Government has connected more *iTaukei* villages to electricity, water and roads than the other side and all previous Governments have done combined. As I have said before, landowners are benefitting more than ever.

My point is, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that any suggestions that indigenous Fijians are somehow being deprived is a complete lie. We provide for all. We do not look at skin colour. We do not look at the background. We do not look at who they are related to.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Honourable Qereqeretabua went ahead and cursed us and our children. I just want us to think about the mindset that makes someone do this. What has my daughter done to Honourable Qereqeretabua? Unfortunately, for the Honourable Member, God is bigger than her curse.

Far from gaining support, Honourable Qereqeretabua showed Fiji her true nature. I commend WOWS Kids Fiji for denouncing her comments. Children should never be used for political gain. Mark 10:16 states and I quote, "And he keep the children in His arm and blessed them."

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as I point these things out, I hope that the other side is listening.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have a Point of Order, what is your Point of Order?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Standing Order 45 (4) (c) states and I quote, "...discreditable references to Parliament or any member ..." should not be used which the Honourable Member is specifically referring to an Honourable Member which is her own opinion. There has been no independent investigation on that so she should not be referring to a specific Member without any evidence.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have made your Point of Order. You have the floor.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, as I point these things out, I hope that the other side is listening. I want politics to stop and I want us to move forward and provide the best for our children, the opportunities that many of us were never provided, need to be given to everyone.

I would like to conclude by showing my full support to the Address by His Excellency our President. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Selai Adimaitoga for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for morning tea which will be for half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS
BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on His Excellency the President's Address and I now give the floor to the Honourable Lynda Tabuya. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give my reply to His Excellency the President's Address in opening this second session of Parliament. But before I begin my response, I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land on which Parliament House stands, *na Vanua o Nadonumai vua na Turaga na Tui Suva* and his people.

I especially acknowledge the *Yavusa o Vatuwaqa*, *Yavusa o Nayavumata* and the *Yavusa o Nauluvatu*.

I also acknowledge the sad passing of the *Radini Vanua*, the wife of the *Liuliu ni Yavusa o Matanikorovatu* in Kalabu, Litia Tupa Rawiriwiri, and her immense contribution to the people of Kalabu, Nasinu and Fiji of which I am a beneficiary. She will be sorely missed.

The Honourable Prime Minister, in his response, acknowledged the young climate champs, who went to New York and I want to make a special mention of a young lady that is sitting in the gallery today, Ann Mary Raduva, who also went to New York and is one of our stars and also attends Adi Cakobau School. So, I would like to welcome her here today.

(Acclamation)

In His Excellency's Address, the President encouraged us not to sow politics of fear but to deliver solutions to those great challenges. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, the first step in delivering solutions to our problems is to, first of all, admit that we have a problem. I stand here today to give a voice to the many of us, who feel a collective sense of despair. A nation that is demoralised and left with little hope.

One of the biggest problems, Mr. Speaker, is that many of us believe that the laws that protect and govern this land is not applied equally in the same way to those in power. The truth is, many of us felt disheartened and betrayed when we watched the video of the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua's assault by the Honourable Prime Minister within the precincts of Parliament. We then watched in disbelief and frustration as the institutions charged with upholding our laws dragged their feet.

For weeks on end, many of us watched and waited as the responsibility was passed around like a game of rugby from the Police to the Privileges Committee and in the end, the Honourable Prime Minister apologised and flew off to be a chief guest overseas, while the assaulted Honourable Pio Tikoduadua got suspended for half a year without pay.

Now, the Parliament staff ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... Now, the Parliament staff blamed for leaking the video, both lost their jobs at Parliament. Present in the gallery here today is Iliesa Raiduduva, that former Parliament staff and his dear sick

mother who is watching from home and I acknowledge the strength they have portrayed during this very challenging time and turning their adversity into positivity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I want to personally thank the kind donors who gave to the GoFundMe Campaign to raise \$8,200 for Iliesa and his family. This was despite bad-hearted people trying to stop a genuine cause by reporting to GoFundMe that I was fundraising for myself.

Finally after three months of delays, I will be handing over those funds today, which will help greatly with their family expenses, especially to care for Iliesa's sick mother and his small farm and market produce. God Bless you Iliesa and family. And I want to say to those bad-hearted people, "Good will always triumph over evil and the truth will always prevail."

Honourable Speaker, Parliament has no jurisdiction in hearing and determining criminal offences. Let me remind Honourable Members of this House that Section 20(d) of the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act states that any person who assaults a Member of Parliament within the precincts of Parliament is guilty of an offence. Furthermore, Section 32 states that a written authority by the Attorney-General is to be given to refer the matter for prosecution.

To date, the Honourable Attorney-General has not issued that authority which he rightly should do so as the next step after that Privileges Committee finding in the September Sitting. This has left many of us to believe that the whole exercise by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) was aimed at letting the Honourable Prime Minister walk with a little more than an apology. Because of this, many of us have lost trust in the custodians of those laws, our Government.

The truth is, when citizens believe that Police do not investigate and charge leaders and those that are in authority to the same standards as ordinary citizens, it is a problem and many of us lose trust in that institution.

The Commissioner of Police was reported in the *Fiji Times* calling for support. Those attacks on police are wrong and my heart goes out to the police officers' families. But how can the Commissioner expect to get support from the public, if many of us believe that the police torture and kill suspects without being fully prosecuted, or if they are convicted, get suspended sentences and are out in no time? That is the problem! Support must be given to be received.

The 2016 Amnesty International Report on Fiji states that beatings, rape, sexual violence, attack by police dogs and even murder are being used by the Disciplined Forces with impunity. Disciplined Forces, who commit human rights abuses rarely face prosecution because Fiji's 2013 Constitution entrenches immunities for any Government action between 2006 and 2014, and even when these officials are convicted of crimes, they are often quickly pardoned and released from prison.

Now, the problem is that, none of this, including the recent injustice of the torture and abuse...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ...of the 16 year old child by the Military were mentioned by the delegation to the UN Human Rights Council just two weeks ago.

His Excellency the President quoted our children endearingly on how they felt about the Constitution, but has anyone asked that 16 year old child how he feels about the Constitution?

The Acting Chief Justice, Kamal Kumar; DPP, Christopher Pryde; and Police Commissioner, Sitiveni Qiliho; appeared before the UN Human Rights Council to defend Fiji's laws, laws that were heavily criticized by other nations, including the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Anna Palladino, for not allowing trade unions the right to rally and assemble.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Listen Honourable Minister!

I know because I have waited time and again with my union brothers and sisters for a chance to exercise our democratic right to march and advocate for the \$4 minimum wage and workers' rights which, by the way...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.-... the people are still waiting on a year later, Honourable Minister, of the so-called Wages Review to happen. Where is that? Waiting, waiting!

HON. P.K. BALA.- It is happening!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Waiting, waiting. But this problem will not stop us, it will not deter us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, stop carrying out a conversation with someone else but through me, do not forget that.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, the workers of this country stand in solidarity to press on and demand our democratic rights to assemble and the freedom of speech to fight against poverty, to fight for our poor, to increase the minimum wage and change our labour laws to be fair and just to workers. We shall not be moved!

The mere fact that the Chief Justice, the DPP and the Police Commissioner appeared together to represent and defend this Government at the UN Human Rights Council, that is, the problem. It does not augur well in the belief that these institutions are independent of the Government, the same institutions that are supposed to uphold the rule of law above anything or anyone.

The economic and moral fabrics of our nation are tearing at the seams, weighed down by the people's loss of trust in it. Now, economically, there is a problem because the Government had to cut about a billion dollars from the Budget. This is a huge failure by the Honourable Minister for Economy, a 25 percent Budget cut! If he was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a company, he would be fired already.

The economic crisis we find ourselves in is because of this Government's reckless spending in the last 12 years, something that it cannot always blame previous Governments for. You are in the third term of your Government, you are the previous Government!

The problem is that, the Government is desperately in financial trouble just from looking at all the austerity measures and cuts to almost every sector in our economy. We all know because many of us are talking about the hikes in new taxes and fees and the Government service charges. The reduction and delay in service delivery in the Public Service meets the common excuse of 'No Money'.

Businesses are losing faith in Government with overly aggressive tax audits by FICAC and FRCS with every major decision bottlenecked with the Honourable Attorney-General. As you say in my *iTaukei* language, "*E cava tiko mada.*" The problem is, the Honourable Attorney-General does not even trust his own Ministers to make their own decisions. The problem is, we have a lawyer running the economy. That lawyer has failed and he should resign. Let the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritiem Development, Waterways and Environment, who is the Economist, run the economy.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Many businesses do not really see the continued economic growth that this Government likes to boast about. All they see is that, it is not easy doing business in Fiji. The Ease of Doing Business world ranking of Fiji dropped from 43rd in 2008 to its lowest point of 102nd this year. With so many hindrances to doing business in Fiji, it is no wonder that many great investment plans do not eventuate.

The Fiji Government, in its desperation to accept any investment plans, has in some cases, compromised the checks and balances required in vetting them. The Malolo Island environment catastrophe was one, but most shocking has been the revelations highlighted by the recent *Al Jazeera* story on Grace Road. Let us talk about Grace Road.

This extensive news report uncovered the intimate connections between the Grace Road Church and this Government. In it, the report alleges that Grace Road has been given lucrative Government contracts, including renovations to the President and Prime Minister's residences. Those renovations have happened and yet, the landowners who leased the Deuba land...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Where is the evidence?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ...with the promise of a school are still waiting.

Ask them! Ask the landowners!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The leader of Grace Road Church, who has been convicted in Korea for human rights violations boasted to one day rule through politics and saying that Fijians are not very smart and that they will conquer, govern and rule. Those are seditious statements!

For the Government to issue a statement defending those seditious statements as possibly doctored by a very reputable media organisation like *Al Jazeera*, and the lack of urgent attention to the torture and

beatings of human beings happening on our soil without proper investigation, is fuelling the public's declining confidence in the investment initiatives of this Government, as well as the maintaining of law and order by the very institutions that the public depends on to protect us.

We are left with no choice, Honourable Speaker, but to turn to our people for their voices to be heard. I just cannot sit here in this House and pretend everything is normal, where because of the love of money, organisations like Grace Road Church are allowed to operate and be guarded. I intend to bring a petition to the people during the February Sitting, I am calling for a Parliamentary inquiry to fully investigate and suspend all operations until investigations are finalised.

We must protect our workers, we must protect our people, we must protect our country, we must take the necessary steps as Parliament, the highest authority of this land, to address this problem. Many of us, including most recently former Nausori Mayor, Moti Lal, have questioned if the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on infrastructure and roads had been fully accounted for. We look at the *lovo*-sized big potholes and wonder if the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) uses its budget to cover the surface of the roads just in time for the elections, instead of digging it up and providing foundation to last. Now the rains continue to wash away the thin top layer of Government efforts to reveal the big holes in their promises.

The problem is that, the only road that the Government is heavily protecting and invested in, is Grace Road. Another reason why our roads are constantly in disrepair is due to the large amount of vehicles this Government floods Fiji with. Why is this Government continuing to flood the market with cars that continue to cause traffic jams, spanning many kilometres adding to the polluting smog in the mornings that cannot simply be copped away.

Consultations are underway for the Climate Change Act. Is this just another avenue to access money yet we do not do the necessary at home to mitigate the effects of climate change - as the Shadow Minister for Environment, this is a problem. Is it because Customs duty collected from imports like secondhand vehicles, accounted for the second higher source of Government indirect tax revenue collected - in 2018, almost a whopping \$666 million. The other way in which the Government can raise revenue is to dispose the Government assets such as EFL to the tune of nearly \$400 billion.

Time will tell if corporatising these national assets will result in the selling of our children's future. Government's desperate attempts to grab cash is falling short and leaving holes in our National Budget as big as those found on our roads. Our people are struggling, our businesses are struggling, increased lawlessness, drug abuse, sexual violence - these are results of a Government that is losing control. With due respect, it is all very well for His Excellency the President, to quote children about how they feel about the Constitution. What about our many children who face the daily struggles of poverty, who fall victim to physical violence and neglect because of the stresses of meeting daily needs?

The many children who fall victim to sexual molestation and sexual violence because they are the most vulnerable, most innocent and easiest targets. Morally, many of us have lost trust in the Government's ability to protect our children, our women, our citizens to maintain law and order with the widespread use of drugs, in the backlash of the public to torture by the Discipline Forces. In most of these cases, the Police and the Fiji Human Rights Commissioner, Ashwin Raj, tells us, "The investigations are ongoing." Many of us are still waiting in vain for justice.

The widespread and shocking news of hard drugs like methamphetamine, especially by our youth and children. The Honourable Prime Minister talks about protecting our youth and children and propping them up - this is a huge problem that begins with opening of our borders to criminal elements. A poor reflection of this Government's Immigration and Border Control Policies.

As a Shadow Minister for Labour, I get inundated with disheartening reports about the effects of Government running out of money. I was recently informed that teachers and some civil servants are not getting paid on time. A delay of a single day for us may be nothing, but those receiving wages can be very stressful on a family living from pay-check to pay-check. I have been informed of situations where interest rates have drastically increased with money lenders and credit institutions, leading to extreme cases where hire purchased household items are repossessed.

In some credit institutions, there are public notices displayed that loans will not be given to civil servants because they are unreliable debtors, so how do we, as leaders of our nation in Parliament, solve this problem? It is simple, the Government should resign.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It has failed our people, it is 13 years now - too long, but their government obviously is not prepared to admit that there is a problem and to resign.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- If you are not going to resign then the Government must show us: respect the rule of law and apply the law equally. That would be upholding the 2013 Constitution they so proudly flaunt.

Our Prayer here in Parliament, Honourable Speaker, "... to keep the trust of those who have sent us here", this has been broken. Until we keep this trust, there are many of us who will never fully trust this Government ever. Secondly, this Government is to include us - the people, in their decision-making process, not talking about token representation on Standing Committees. I am talking about a genuine attempt to work together, it is not just your problem anymore, it is our problem.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We have to solve it together as a nation. This nation is in deep trouble. I feel that the coming days will be dark and trying.

Mr. Speaker, that is why, I cannot support the motion before the House and it is my prayer, Mr. Speaker, that we all stand together united in this bold attempt to face it. Because if we do not, ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Listen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... we will drown individually in a tidal wave of national debt that not even a World Bank loan can save us from. May God bless Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lynda Tabuya for her contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts; the Honourable Rosy Akbar. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: *Ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Honourable Speaker, I stand to respond and thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major General (Retired) Jioji Konrote's official Address delivered in this august House on the occasion of the Opening of Parliament.

As His Excellency told us in his Address, I quote: "You are each here to serve as guardians of every Fijian's wellbeing." Of course, Honourable Speaker, Sir, a few things uplift wellbeing more significantly than education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am extremely honoured to lead the Government's work to empower our citizens through education. I remain committed as ever to deliver on our Honourable Prime Minister's vision of a Fijian education system where every Fijian child has an equal shot at new and better opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency spoke to the rights enshrined within our Constitution, including the right to education and the right to information. Education, of course, is a progressive right and one to which this Government has given real meaning. We have opened the doors to learning to all Fijians, regardless of economic or social status, religion, ethnicity, gender or physical ability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency emphasised the comprehensiveness of the 2013 Fijian Constitution with specific comparison between the divided past and the united future of all Fijians. Last week, I had the privilege to officiate at the Suva Grammar School's annual awards function where I reminded the children, the teachers and the parents of how far we have come in terms of overcoming racial and societal divide, all of which can be attributed to our Constitution and the awareness which has been created around it.

Our Constitution is the rock on which our democratic society is built. It is broad in its scope and bold in its ambitions, as His Excellency himself stated, and I quote once again: "Nowhere was Fiji's surging civic awareness displayed more passionately or more creatively than through the wonderful submissions we received during the 'Hashtag Our Constitution Challenge'".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Honourable Prime Minister affirmed that the submissions by the young participants contained "humbling testimonies and inspirational creativeness". Most of our little children wrote big ideas signalling how safe and secure they feel under the new Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to them, it guarantees equality amongst all our citizens. They enjoy exercising their rights, privileges and enjoying the benefits. At the same time, through their posts, they reveal a strong understanding of their civic responsibilities and citizenships. Those were indeed wise words from our young, who represent the future of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, listening to our Honourable Prime Minister while speaking to mark the National Constitution Day celebration, I was touched to hear him say, and I quote once again: "My favourite part of the Fijian Constitution is Chapter 2, Section 31 - Right to education".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government endeavours to go one step further where we do not only ensure that every Fijian gets access to that basic right but we provide equitable and quality education for all. Our aim is to provide technical, vocational as well as special education. We have an education dream for our students in our beloved nation, and this dream is not only in-line to achieve a knowledge-based society, but also to ensure excellence in all facets of education. Today, more than ever we need a new standard of excellence in education,

matched by unequivocal access to education opportunities, enabling each citizen to develop their talents to the maximum possible extent pegged to global benchmarks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heavily invested in early childhood and primary education because we firmly believe in a smarter Fiji and the path to knowledge-based literacy and numeracy in our society getting the basics right first. In doing so, as a nation, we have achieved what can only be a dream for many countries, what some critics describe as “freebies” in education is a gift to the underprivileged and the less fortunate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 195 countries in the world out of which only 24 provide free or close to free education. I share these statistics because some critics are quick to compare our achievements with those of our neighbouring countries, let me assure you, none of which are on the free education list.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency has duly reminded us of the need for the priceless assurance of future security, I strongly echo his sentiments. In the not-so-distant past, children would burn their midnight lamps, excel academically to the bliss of expecting parents and yet to be mercilessly denied tertiary education due to financial barriers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today, every Fijian child lives with a peace of mind that his efforts will be rewarded with equal and non-discriminatory financial assistance paving the way for a brighter future. These children from struggling families will be able to break the shackles of the vicious cycle of poverty thus leading to a better standard of living, all the time feeling empowered by the support of this Government of the day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government remains committed to ensuring the sustainability of the Free Education initiative, Free Bus Fare Scheme, Free Textbooks Programme, Transport Assistance Programme, National Toppers Scholarship Scheme (NTSS) , the Tertiary Education Loans Scheme (TELS) and the Overseas Scholarship and Scholarships for Children with Special Needs Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to note that Fiji has already made great strides towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in His Excellency's speech, he mentioned the introduction of a new Climate Change Bill for the 2019/2020 legislative agenda, to address the undisputable issues and challenges arising and to plan adaptation and mitigation responses for safeguarding our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government envisions a society that can protect the environment, improve health and of course, broaden access to education. My Ministry will work to implement new climate change education programmes throughout the education sector to lend our maximum support to realising the commitments made by our Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change education has always been a fundamental perspective of the Fiji National Curriculum Framework. Recognising the significance of involving our children in climate change, *talanoa* sessions will empower them to make informed contextualised decisions about its irreversible effects and the impacts that these will have in their future lives. My Ministry remains committed to ensuring that children learn to value local and cultural knowledge and the environment as well as the global and scientific approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, environmental education has empowered our students to assume responsibility for creating sustainable futures. My Ministry remains committed to ensuring that students develop their knowledge, critical thinking and appropriate values to take decisions on environmental and development issues. I accept that like any government service, there will always be scope for us to do better and we have partially achieved our

millennium goals but I see a great need for positivity. I stand firmly against the powerhouses of misinformation and fact distortion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry through its initiative on Citizenship Education has taught students to respect others and to have an appreciation for our multicultural heritage and we will continue to do so. We have thus developed students and will develop students who will be responsible, informed and involved global citizens.

My Ministry also remains committed to delivering formal instructions in civic responsibilities, democratic responsibilities, politics and good governance. We have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, demonstrated this commitment over the years in familiarising our students with the 2013 Constitution and thus enabling the wider citizenry to understand how social and political systems operate.

My Ministry also recognizes the need for a holistic approach in the implementation of the Citizenship Education Programme. The intention is to develop in students the relevant skills, to promote peace building, democracy, human rights, responsibilities and development. Mr. Speaker, Sir, through this programme, our children and adapt and practice beliefs and philosophies that enhance their roles as productive citizens of our great nation.

My Ministry's strategic plan is underpinned by a responsible fiscal strategy, investing in teacher recruitments and new teacher registrations as well as their continued professional development, the digital literacy programme and improved infrastructure.

Every day we seek to honour the Honourable Prime Minister's pledge that we will leave no one behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have increased access to learning across the board since our first electoral victory in 2014.

- We have established 875 early childhood care and education centres catering for our young students from age five;
- We have increased special needs education by 87 percent over five years across our 17 special education schools;
- The Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board (TSLB) has increased the number of Fijians in higher and further institutions of learning by 328 percent since 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many of these achievements are borne from the introduction of free education for all Fijians, particularly the gains we have also seen for women's education and women's empowerment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also eliminating location as a barrier to education by subsidizing the transportation of about 85,000 students in 2019.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we opened another pilot project run with the University of Newcastle and the Fiji National University (FNU) - the Science and Engineering Challenge. This brought together students from eight primary and eight secondary schools over the Central Division for over two days to encourage our students to consider careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics by studying relevant subjects whilst still in school and we hope and wish to expand this programme to the other divisions from next year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working to install internet access in schools where there is no access currently. As part of the Ministry's infrastructure audit, we are also checking the access of schools internet so we can address those schools in need as our priority.

As our students become more comfortable and acquainted with new technology, we believe their classroom resources needs to keep pace as well. We need to teach students how to operate responsibly in online spaces. It is not alright to cyber-bully. It is definitely not alright to try and manufacture fake news. And definitely it is not alright to judge a persons' worth in the number of "likes" they get on social media.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our embrace of the modern education system is not limited to adapting new technology. It is also present in the manner we empower our teachers.

We continue to work with the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission to embed more effectively a framework for promoting human rights within our curriculum. As has been said, our children are not born with discriminatory notions embedded in their minds. That is a learned behaviour and they take their lead from us adults in their lives. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as adults need to prove to be good role models for all our children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have taken a major step towards the area of disaster risk management and reduction. With support from UNICEF and UNDP, we have developed a manual for teachers and students to promote Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Disaster Risk Management (DRM).

We are taking the same approach in relation to Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) Programme, again in cooperation with United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) - Australia, our various NGOs and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. With them, we are developing an education programme on WASH. We have found that following disasters, whether a cyclone or a flood, a follow up in terms of our collective health, inspection and disease control is mandatory.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we will soon be asked to ratify the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. This will definitely benefit our three local universities and more importantly our students. This will provide mutual recognition of qualification across the Asia-Pacific region which means that a qualification in accounting, for example, from any of our three universities will be recognised by Asia and other Pacific nations against their qualifications.

This will enable our students to secure the work they are qualified to perform in other countries. This will further reinforce the quality of qualifications from our universities which will be compared with some of the best universities in particular Asia and indeed the world.

Mr. Speaker Sir, my Ministry is implementing the Government's zero tolerance policy on corporal punishment. We provide counselling services to students who suffer from corporal punishment and we also report cases to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and of course to the Fiji Police for further investigation and action.

Mr. Speaker Sir, not only are we bringing technology into our classrooms, we are using it to improve efficiency and decision making within the Ministry. We have long operated a database of information for schools as well as teachers. We are now building on to the Fiji Education Management Information System (FMIS) to create new opportunities to ease the administrative load on our schools. We are now able to manage text books orders, better monitor the use of Free Education Grant and cross check the use of e-ticketing with our students' attendance.

Mr. Speaker Sir, another innovation which is being implemented is the transfer of the Technical Colleges of Fiji to the Fiji National University. Our Technical College students will now benefit from a clear pathway to higher qualifications from Certificate 1 to Certificate 4 levels and then into Diploma or Degree as they choose. This will ensure that we work to develop more skills in our TVET sector to meet the growing needs of our growing economy.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to appeal to the Honourable Members of this House not to politicize the education of young Fijians. I again quote from His Excellency's Address and I quote;

“Our children, our grandchildren and their children who will come after them, those are the Fijians we are ultimately meant to serve. Let us serve them well by building a future worthy of their greatest dreams and aspirations.”

I conclude Mr. Speaker Sir, by expressing my thanks on behalf of the Fijian people to all those that contribute to the successes of my Ministry. I extend my sincerer gratitude to our teachers, the backbone of my Ministry. I pray tribute to those selfless members of our society who rise every day to inspire greatness in our children.

In response to Honourable Tabuya's statement about some teachers not getting paid on time, there are reasons for that. Honourable Speaker if I can clarify that, it is not that the Ministry does not have the money, it is simply that there are issues with their contracts. Sometimes we receive contracts late, sometimes the contracts are given out late and I stand to apologise for any inconvenience that may be caused to these teachers. In my one year of experience in this Ministry, we have been able to identify a lot of issues and we are rectifying that and I can assure them that come 2020 we will be better prepared to serve our teachers and our schools. I can assure them on that.

Like I said, once again I would like to extend our gratitude to all the teachers, the backbone of my Ministry and I pay tribute to all those selfless members of our society who rise every day to inspire greatness in our children. I also wish to acknowledge and thank the many NGOs and Civil Society Organisations or faith-based organisations that partner with us in trying to raise the quality of education.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we also benefit greatly from the support of our colleagues in the various UN agencies and other regional and international bodies. I can assure this august House and the Fijian people that my Ministry is committed and focused on delivering on all of the priorities of the FijiFirst Government in striving to support every Fijian in meeting their aspirations for education.

Honourable Speaker Sir, with those words, I commend His Excellency's Address to the House and on a special note, I would like to wish all the Honourable Members of this august House on both sides a very Merry Christmas and a blessed 2020. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the next speaker, the Honourable Salote Radrodro. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you Honourable Speaker, and I thank our Lord Jesus Christ for the gift of life to each and everyone of us. And I also thank the opportunity to be here to respond to His Excellency's Address for the opening of the new Parliament Session.

Honourable Speaker, at the outset I must say that I, not only as a Member of Parliament but moreso as a woman, a mother and a grandmother am gripped with a deep sense of sadness and concern for our beloved Fiji and our future generations. And I say this because this FijiFirst Government is in denial of the adverse reality they have brought upon our people. They are working not keeping in mind the welfare of future generations but the next elections so to continue to remain in power.

Honourable Speaker, politics is like air and water and we know that there is bad politics; everyone is polluted, everyone is unhealthy. Just see the people on the street and how they act. People are angry and dispirited about Government's inability and failure, for example, the increasing crime especially violence against women and children. We even hear in the media that children are raping children and according to the Acting Director of Women reporting at the most recent UN Human Rights Meeting in Geneva that eight women lost their lives in the last 8 months.

And by the way, why was not the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation with the delegation in Geneva so to report on the ineffective enforcement of legislations, policies and programmes of this Government in regards to the elimination of violence against women and children?

Honourable Speaker, civil servants are always the punching bags and when things are not rosy, just like in this case, they are sent by their political masters to face the brunt of international scrutiny and at the same time always being blamed for poor service delivery at home.

Honourable Speaker, often times the Gender Policy and the Women's Plan of Action are being used to justify statements by the Government when promoting SDG 5 on Gender Equality. But based on the presentation by the Acting Director for Women, the glaring horrific fatalities are negative performance indicators which clearly reflects that Gender Policy and Women Plan of Action are useless because they have not been given the needed resources for effective implementation. And what is even more concerning and sad is that when we on this side of the House move that budgetary allocation be increased during budget debate, it is not even supported by the Minister for Women herself and the whole of Government side.

And Honourable Speaker, that happens because this , "*Lave liga* Government squad", fear victimization of losing their seat as stipulated under the 2013 Constitution Chapter 63, Part 8 which dictates that "voting only happens according to Party lines."

This is just one of the many examples of dictatorship in the guise of democracy...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ...that is in this 2013 Constitution. The FijiFirst Government must stop using and insulting the Presidency to rubber stamp the 2013 Constitution. And also to stop wasting taxpayers money to promote it through national and international opportunities or even taking drastic measures like removal of the Ratu Sukuna Public Holiday and replacing it with Constitution Public Holiday. The renaming of the road just outside Parliament here to Constitution Avenue are nothing but an exercise in futility because this 2013 Constitution will never be written in the hearts of people. It is not the people's Constitution and it must be reviewed.

Furthermore Honourable Speaker, I was at a workshop for Pacific Island States last week on, "Gun Violence and Illicit Small Arms Trafficking from a Gender Perspective" and we were advised that Fiji has about 3,462 unregistered and illicit firearms missing from the military armoury after the 2000 *coup* and they are still floating around in our communities. And there are about 16,700 guns under the Military, 2,000 guns under the Police, and recently according to the media the Police could be issued with Taser guns. So, how can we be talking about peace and non-violence?

With our population of about 900,000 people, that is just too many guns to be missing, too many guns to be owned by the Military and too many guns to be owned by the Police. The associated socio-economic risks and problems faced by our people now are huge, and we do not want to reach a futuristic stage of armed conflict

as experienced by some of our neighbouring countries. Honourable Speaker, I call upon the Government side to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty.

Honourable Speaker, budgetary provisions for the Military continue to see a steady increase every year, accompanied with purchase of firearms. And why? Is it because the Fiji Government needs the Army to protect them from the enslaved and oppressed Fijian people? And we must always remember that spending more money on military defence rather than programmes of social uplift, is indeed pushing us faster towards approaching moral decay and spiritual doom.

Honourable Speaker, a good part of His Excellency's Address focused on the 2013 Constitution, and children are being used as a marketing tool, as a dice on the political chessboard to massage their political agenda. For example, and I quote from His Excellency's Address on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019 which is stated on page 7 of the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard*:

“Our favourite part of the Constitution is one on the Rights of Children because we are protected, cared for and empowered to become good Fijian citizens.”

But recently the *Fiji Times* published that since 2014, a total of 723 children were reported to be missing, of which 37 are still missing. And what is the Government doing to find these missing children? If those on the Government side care to walk the streets, you will find children of school age selling food parcels as late into the night to help their parents earn a living.

The *Fiji Sun* reported recently that children as young as 14 years are treated for drug addiction and according to the Permanent Secretary for Defence, the number of people involved in drugs is alarming. Marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin are some of the drugs that are being used in Fiji. And he further added that drug usage is a growing problem in Fiji and it would become an issue of national security if not addressed immediately in communities and schools.

Honourable Speaker, that was an honest acknowledgment and call for national action by the Permanent Secretary. But did we hear any distinctive specific policies, programmes and resources allocation to address this national problem in His Excellency's Address? What are we doing as legislators about these big evils in our society that is here not only to destroy our children and our youth, but to kill our future generation?

We will recall that we, on this side of the House, reached out to the Government, for example, we move motions to:

- set up a Commission of National Inquiry on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children;
- set up an Education Commission;
- improve border control and awareness campaigns to decrease human trafficking;
- set up a Special Committee to combat the rising drug problem; and
- set up a Reconciliation Commission to review the 2013 Constitution.

But, Honourable Speaker, unfortunately, the Fiji Government rejected all those great nation-building initiatives and in doing so, reflects the fact that they are lost in their own ego and chaos, blindly feeling their way along, oblivious and ignoring the nation's problems but determined to do all in their power to convince themselves and others that the nation is not in crisis.

So, does this Government really care about Fiji and her people, that is, for Fiji to live in peace, order, safety and happiness or do they only care about themselves, their families and their cronies as demonstrated in the high level of nepotism and corruptive practices?

His Excellency's Address also mentioned the constitution right of Josua from Moala in Lau, and which has led to improvement of his health and medical services. If, indeed, that is true, then why was there no mention of proactive preventative policies and programmes with required resources for implementation purposes to address NCD which has become the biggest killer in Fiji, causing thousands of deaths and amputations every year? Many of those are premature deaths and also adversely affecting the lives of many more, especially family members.

According to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, almost 80 percent of deaths in Fiji are NCD-related and those numbers are still growing. So are diabetes testing kit and hypertension medication easily available in Moala Health Centre? If someone is diagnosed with heart disease or women with breast and cervical cancer in Moala, is repatriation to CWM Hospital an easily available option or is financial assistance easily available to patients opting for overseas treatment from Moala or anywhere around Fiji?

These are what people care about. And what is the ability or capacity in any Health Centre around Fiji in delivering such services?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Minister, we just did a fundraising to help someone take themselves to India for medical treatment.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, after *TC Winston* in February 2016, Yacata District School and Avea District School are still not being constructed. I know I have brought these cases up in this House on few occasions, but still, even though we have heard from the Honourable Minister for Education, why have these people been left behind? Is there no money? How was that tender awarded to the construction company? Those are the questions people are asking.

This Government also talks big about climate change overseas, but at home they are engaged with unbalanced development and not taking care of our environment. For example, the destruction of mangroves in Nawi Savusavu and Malolo, over extraction of gravel and sand, bauxite mining in Nawailevu, all those are ruining our environment and natural resources, and also public health is endangered.

I know the importance of providing clean environment for our children for I have attended funerals of children dying from asthma attacks. And, Honourable Speaker, it is just horrifying that we have to fight our own Government to save our environment. If Joselyn Mani of Labasa is telling us about the values she sees in equal protection, treatment and benefit under the law, then how come we continue to have selective investigations and prosecutions which are purely political and systematically silencing people?

We have just recently witnessed in this House the selective reading and application of the law, in the case of the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, and Honourable Tikoduadua is still being suspended and the Honourable Prime Minister, the perpetrator, is sitting in this House. What about the 16 year old boy who was interrogated by the Military for allegations on writing those swear words on Honourable Prime

Minister in dusty back of the bus? It is only to be regretted that the rich and the powerful too often bend the acts of Government for their own selfish purposes.

Whilst still on the 2013 Constitution, the Constitution is supposed to help protect ordinary people everyday against abuse of power by those in authority. I challenge the Government that if it genuinely believes that the 2013 Constitution is the best Constitution and is the most appropriate remedy to our legal and political establishment, then let us have a national debate.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Let us have a national debate, otherwise until then I reserve the adjectives I would like to use to describe it. His Excellency's Address said and I quote from Page 4 of the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard*:

“So much of Fijian's progress over the past decade is owed to 10-years unbroken streak of economic growth.”

That is what this Government is telling us, but let us look at what the people face in their daily lives as a result of their economic laws, regulations, policies and programmes. Honourable Speaker, allow me to share a story.

Once Confucius was walking on the mountains and he came across a woman weeping by a grave. He asked the woman, “why are you crying?” She replied, “we are a family of hunters, my father was eaten by a tiger, my husband was bitten by a tiger and died, and now also my son.” “Then why do you continue to live up there?” asked Confucius. And the woman replied, “but, Sir, there are no tax collectors up in the mountain!”. Confucius turned to his disciples and added, “you see, a bad government is more to be feared than tigers.”

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, this FijiFirst Government is a bad Government. It overtaxes the common people, those who are struggling to make ends meet. For example, in my recent visit to Nabouwalu Market, I looked for the ladies who sell the ‘*sasalu ni waitui*’. And I was told they have stopped selling because they could not pay their licence and the Department of Fisheries Officials confiscate their products.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON S.V. RADRODRO.- These type of taxing system demonstrate that this FijiFirst Government just do not care about the common people, and will exploit the poor and vulnerable in its desperate efforts to address the financial problematic cash flow, and it is something that I have always highlighted in my previous responses.

Another example as alluded to by Honourable Tabuya and I would like to nail it some more, is on Grace Road. I remember whilst the Standing Committee on Social Affairs scrutinised one of the FNU Annual Reports, it was revealed that the land where the Navua Rice Farm is sitting, was the land earmarked for the construction of the new Koronivia Agricultural College. But instead, this Government gave that land to Grace Road on lease arrangement, which I believe is for about 50 years.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON S.V. RADRODRO.- And from rice farm, Grace Road has extended their business dealings to food, furniture and even dentistry. Now, they have even been granted government, commercial and residential group projects.

People are asking, how can a cult group, like Grace Road, that came in under the guise of church and Christianity with its leader in prison in Korea, be given such business dealings and standing in Fiji by this FijiFirst Government? And you know, Honourable Speaker, social media depict the pictures of leadership on the other side, taking big smiles and photographs with Grace Road.

Honourable Speaker, a constant stream of free money is a perfect way to keep a bad government in power. As aid flows in, there is nothing more to do, and as long as it pays the Army, it does not have to take account of its disgruntled citizens.

On the Committee, he also reminded us as Members of Parliament, on our oversight role through Committee work. And I was shocked to hear that because it is the Government side that:

- changed the Standing Orders four times to suit their own agenda;
- withdrew the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) from the Opposition;
- withdrew the Deputy Chairperson position in all Committees from the Opposition;
- abuses the usage of Standing Order 51 and fast-tracks almost 90 percent or more Bills brought into the House;
- fails to table the Auditor-General's Reports and Annual Reports in a timely manner;
- I can recall, there has not been any Annual Report from the Military from 2015 up until now; and
- the Government side disallowed the Town Hall Community Outreach Programme whereby Members of Parliament from both sides of the House meet members of the communities to hear their concerns and issues.

And I ask the question: Who is playing political football, choosing to play fast and loose with the truth?

In conclusion, Honourable Speaker, I must say that with this FijiFirst Government in power from 2006, people are being watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked and censored. Honourable Speaker, therefore this Government must do the right thing and resign.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- With our freedom suppressed, I look across the floor, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General are not here but to the whole lot on the Government side, may I remind them that they will always be remembered by the people of Fiji as some kind of "spooky characters" from horror movies. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Laughter)

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports, the Honourable Parveen Bala. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Assistant Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament, it is my honour to deliver my opening speech as we begin the 2019/2020 Session of Parliament, needless to say that I stand in support of the motion proposed by the Honourable Prime Minister to thank His Excellency for his Address.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Lynda, in her response, talked about the minimum wage rate. What is happening to that? For her information, work has begun to review the national minimum wage rate early this year. It was widely published in the media, especially the *Fiji Times* and I think she missed it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I turn to a few updates and announcements from my portfolio, allow me to commend His Excellency the President, for his powerful and pertinent address at the opening of this new Session of Parliament for 2019/2020.

We hear many speeches in this august House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and over the course of this Session, we will hear many more. Some, we will be privileged to hear and remember because they are everlasting for the vision and forward-thinking that bring on matters to move Fiji forward. Others, less so and others even less so for the blunt fact that they bring down the dignity and position of this House by engaging in futile politics for the sake of debate or disagreement with the ruling Government. Issues like the economy, productivity and employment are the foundation of a strong democracy and a progressive nation and all are areas that need responsible debate and action geared towards progress and harmony for all, not false news, not fake statements.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we recently suffered millions of loss in productivity alone in the one or two days of uncertainty during rumours of a *coup*. Add to that loss of learning through closure of some schools and the psychological damage of the rumours, the costs are enormous, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

His Excellency, the President, in his opening Address rightfully said, and I quote:

“If we treat our economy like a political football and choose to play fast and loose with the truth, we can very well talk ourselves into panic and crumble economic confidence from within.”

This is exactly what happens when we fail to perform our duties as Members of this august House, to promote stability and security in our country.

When we spread rumours and false news about our economy, the hurt is more severe on our workers, their families and on all Fijian families - let us not forget that. This duty to responsible debate as outlined by His Excellency the President is not limited to the Government side. Your allegiance and our allegiance are not to Party alone, it is to the place and people, and it is Fiji that we all represent, irrespective of our Party symbols and slogans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency's Speech at the opening of this Session of Parliament and likewise his earlier wise and sound words of counsel and advice to us as parliamentarians, as leaders and as servants of all Fijians, provides a solid platform so that Fiji develops and progresses towards our stated aims, outcomes, and outputs for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank His Excellency the President as he spoke about the values and its importance as our guiding beacon. His use of examples from a cross-section of Fijians who cherish Fiji for all its

beauty and for the sense of life in a paradise that it offers to all Fijians under the 2013 Constitution as equal citizens of this great nation of ours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013 Constitution under the Bill of Rights guarantees every Fijian fundamental rights and offers a bright future to all Fijians to enjoy the privilege of being united under the same identity as 'Fijians' and offers special protection to our children as the Constitution provides them the protection and rights to security, and free from any form of violence from any source: at home, school, work or in any other places.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a young nation and a nation of the young now more than ever, we need our youth and the rest of our citizens to learn about the Constitution if they have not and the guarantees that it gives to them and their future. This will no doubt add to their values as nation-builders and as proud and productive Fijians.

I thank His Excellency the President for the force of his convictions in standing firm on his belief in the Constitution as the supreme law of the land and how and why it impacts on what constitutes credible leadership in this august House. It is important, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we show those qualities of consensus-building, and showing respect as leaders of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to by His Excellency the President, in his opening speech, Fijians continue to express and voice their democratic and constitutional rights under the 2013 Constitution. These constitutional rights provide assurance, security, peace and goodwill to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is with great pride that I offer my hearty congratulations to the FijiFirst Leader, our Honourable Prime Minister, for successfully leading our Party and Fiji through the first year of our second term of office and he has continued to cut an inspiring and sometimes imposing figure for his untiring and energetic drive to continue fighting for the issues that he and this FijiFirst Government are key to our present and future. These include seeking awareness of and achieving the following:

- i) Education: Accessible and readily available for all Fijians;
- ii) Climate change: Making global and local waves on an issue that we cannot ignore and that we cannot afford to ignore;
- iii) Equality of citizenship for all Fijians: Righting the wrongs that have existed for more than 34 years since our Independence;
- iv) Respect for law and order and for the rule of law;
- v) Empowering Women and Children;
- vi) Continued economic growth; and
- vii) Aably promoted a Fiji for all that is fair, just and progressive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is only a highlight reel of his achievement and his continued drive and energy on these matters and all others that relate to a strong and better Fiji, while leaving his global footprints in areas like climate change, is truly a fine achievement for a statesman.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no doubt the FijiFirst Government is well-placed to continue to deliver on the programmes and achievements from our first term and now as we enter the second year of the second term in office.

In concluding, I think all of them will say, "Resign, resign, resign" but I will tell them, please, have patience, wait for the 2022 Elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now turn my attention to talk briefly about the portfolios under my Ministry and their existing works and some of the plans and visions that we have for them. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the portfolios of

Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations under my Ministry are responsible for the promotion of social justice in workplaces through the provision of awareness, training, advisory services and capacity-building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is a member State to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and in the 108th Session of the ILO Governing Body in Geneva in June this year, agrees to adopt the ILO Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019 that will chart the work of the ILO over the next 100 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our labour laws comply with international best practices in terms of human rights, employment relations, employment standards and operational management and productivity. Mr. Speaker, Sir, productivity is the key factor for Fiji to raise living standards and improve our general economic outlook. Our 15-year National Productivity Master Plan (2021-2036) for Fiji has been developed in collaboration with the Asian Productivity Organisation to map our National Productivity milestones and directions to increase productivity in the workplaces.

Align with productivity is the area of innovation and this is an area that my Ministry will turn their attention in the coming months. Mr. Speaker, Sir, productivity and innovation will be our investment towards a better future for all Fijians. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, with the assistance of the Internal Labour Organisation, is working on implementing a paperless labour inspection system in Fiji. It will also ensure robust data collection and facts-based decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Pacific Labour Scheme under the Australian Government is now providing three-year work contracts to our semi-skilled workers. To date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have sent more than 100 workers in the tourism and the meat industries. This week, for the information of this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will host a team of six employers in the Aged Cared Industry who will be in the country to conduct interviews to potential aged-care workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government most recently, received praises from an Australian employer under the programme for the satisfactory performance of 15 Fijian workers who have recently completed their four months employment duration.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Just listen. In the employer's own words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, "Being the first of our participation, I must say your people are amazing. Fijians are hardworking and determined to earn." With positive feedbacks as such, we should look forward to continue to strengthen our bilateral ties, provide more opportunities for our people and ultimately a win-win outcome with our bilateral partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in October this year, Fiji signed an MOA with the Government of Tuvalu to assist towards capacity-building of their human resources through engagement of our Fijian volunteer teachers. We have definitely supported the creation of jobs and helped deliver, through our employment programmes with higher quality services for our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now I turn to the next set of portfolios under my Ministry, that of Youth and Sports as always. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me ring in some exciting news on the sports front: Firstly the great honour bestowed on our little giant, Jerry Tuwai, for winning the Rugby 7s Player of the Year Award given by the IRB World Rugby's Award 2019.

(Acclamation)

And our congratulations also goes to the Flying Fijians for their win over the Barbarians. This was a great performance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, showing the depth of Fiji Rugby as they pulled up a win based on the Fijian flair

and their new found defensive resolve against some of the world's best including those drawn from the 2019 and earlier World Cup winning teams. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this means well for Fiji Rugby in both the 7s and 15s codes in the coming session.

The FijiFirst Government has prioritised programmes for our youths and for sports. Both are areas of incredible importance to Fiji and its future, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Both are economic drivers and need to be seen and addressed in terms of their growing importance in this respect.

Sports according to RBF Report 2016, Mr. Speaker, Sir, contributed 1.7 percent to Fiji's GDP, this places sports ahead of some of our traditional industries and given the pathway in rugby and in other sports Mr. Speaker, Sir, definitely this figure will continue to raise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry have recently reviewed the Operational Plan for the next five years to ensure it is in line with the National Development Plan and supporting the Sustainable Development Goals. We are changing the way we support our young people and we are in the process of appointing members to the National Youth Council and Youth Workers, a platform to capture youth voices and issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to make a final statement with reference to the comments by His Excellency the President to the fact in less than a year, on 10th October, 2020, Fiji will celebrate its Golden Jubilee or 50 years of Independence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this important milestone is the coming of age given for a nation like Fiji and His Excellency the President pointed out national pride. It is not dictated by such anniversaries, they merely serve to highlight and cement our pride in being Fijian. National pride, Mr. Speaker, Sir, means nation building and I wanted to focus on some of the current social events that are upon us. We need to have more national pride from not just individuals but from institutions in society, so that we do not suffer from a breakdown of our safety mechanisms.

We have some crimes related to alcohol and drug abuse. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pope John Paul II said and I quote:

“When freedom does not have a purpose, when it does not wish to know anything about the rule of law engraved in the hearts of men and women, it does not listen to the voices of conscience, it turns against humanity and society.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these abuse of freedom and indulgence in drugs and alcohol leading to a breakdown of law and order including attacks on the Police is by some of our people. My appeal is to those few who spoil the name of many among our community and in turn spoil the good name of Fiji, to stop and reconsider your options.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Freedom when it is abused, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is no longer freedom but a prison that you have created for yourself through giving up your life to the evils of drug, alcohol and crime. Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the same time I am thankful....

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Do not shake your head, no point.

I am thankful to the Police and relevant authorities for their proactive action to nip drug and alcohol abuse in the bud. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Police also needs more social interventions from religious, NGOs and

traditional authorities to put a stop to the crimes and drug abuse. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the august House for their attention and patience and I look forward to the upcoming 2019-2020 Parliamentary session as we strive to serve the people of Fiji and the mandate that they have given for the vision and development plan of the FijiFirst Government. Thank you, *vinaka* and God bless, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, we will now take an adjournment for lunch and we will resume the debate after lunch. Enjoy your lunch, we adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.25 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.31 p.m.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS
BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on the President's Address. I now give the floor to the Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. JALE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I join the other Honourable Members of this august House in thanking His Excellency the President for his Address at the opening of the 2019 to 2020 Session of Parliament.

His Excellency had briefly touched on the focus and the future development direction that his Government will embark on or continue to pursue in the current parliamentary session and in the future. It is one thing to heap praises on the 2013 Constitution but it is another thing which is a massive task to see to, that the Constitution's spirit and intent represent the view of the people of Fiji.

Sir, I noted the comment that a six-year old had made on the 2013 Constitution as highlighted in His Excellency's Address. A child is defined in some laws, from my understanding, as a person under the age of 12 years cannot be employed or enter into a contract of employment. A child has to be under the guidance of parents and guardian. Also, from my understanding, a child cannot apply for a passport on his own but through parents or guardian. This provides an insight to how the law sees a child. They are vulnerable and cannot be expected to made decisions on their own, let alone commenting on an important document such as the Fiji Constitution.

His Excellency mere reference to the Constitution has opened up the scope of discussion and a Member of this House is at liberty, in my view, to raise any matter within the scope of the Constitution in his or her response to His Excellency's Address. If the responses have to be of use and benefit, the Government should take keen interest and give due consideration to matters raised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had served in the Fiji Civil Service for over 36 years. I was also co-opted to the Military Council during the political upheaval in 2000. I had visited many areas in Fiji and met many people during the campaign in 2014 and 2018 General Elections. My assessment from what I have heard from the people, the majority of the *iTaukei* people do not accept the 2013 Constitution. They feel that they were not consulted and that the Constitution was forced on them. Most of the *iTaukei* whom I spoke with feel that their land and *qoliqoli* are not adequately protected and they feel that they are strangers in their forefather's land. There are other concerns about the Constitution raised with me but I do not intend to raise them at this time.

Yes, there are doubts about the Constitution. We, Members of Parliament cannot turn a blind eye or pretend that we are deaf to the people's cries and concern and it is vital for us to do something about the matter. It is my duty to bring this to the attention of this House. If those concerns do not take action to start the process, then I should not be blamed for not doing something about the matter.

We share a common purpose and that is to serve the people of Fiji to the best of our abilities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the grave matters of great concern to me in my role as a Member of this House, is the difficulty in obtaining information and responses to enquiries raised with the Honourable Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and Chief Executive Officers (CEO). I had written to some Permanent Secretaries and CEOs in the past on matters concerning Government services to people but they never cared to reply.

This attitude has inhibited my ability to serve the people. I will only be able to serve the people of Fiji if I am provided with timely and accurate information by the Government. I wonder whether it is a policy of the Government of the day, which His Excellency the President refers to as "His Government", to deny information

to Opposition Members of the House, or is it a no care attitude by those concerned. The Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Public Service should do something about the matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Party had allocated the Lau area for me to look after for the Party and represent and such my response will be mostly Lau based. Sir, you know Lau more than most Members of the House. Certainly you will be able to appreciate my contribution in that context. The island of Vatoa is part of the *Tikina* of Ono-i-Lau in the Lau Group. The reefs of this island are the grave yard to so many local, foreign going ships and warships. The construction of the lighthouse on the island had saved the lives of so many crew, passengers and ships that have passed close to the island on their journey around the Fiji waters on their way to other parts of the world. The lighthouse is built on a cliff top, the highest point on the island.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 33 of the Constitution provides for right to work and fair wages. Near Christmas in 2017, the officials of a company contracted by the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) arrived at the island of Vatoa with the material to construct and upgrade the Vatoa Lighthouse. The company did not hire a helicopter to ferry the construction material to the site but instead made verbal agreement with the villagers to transfer the material to transport to a nearest point using outboard and to carry the material on their bare shoulders up the cliff to the construction site. Hundreds of bags of cement and gravel, pine posts, water, the tower and other materials were delivered safely to the construction site by around 36 able-bodied men whilst the ladies prepared food and look after the accommodation for the company workers. The rate for the work and other services conducted was agreed to and the work was completed in 2018.

An amount of over \$18,000 is owed to the villagers. The company had promised to send the money to the island from Suva, but never made contact again with the villagers until now. Attempts to get the payment has been unsuccessful until now. The *Turaga ni Koro* for the village has been in Suva for over four months to try to obtain what the villagers are owed. He has been made to run around by Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), the Department responsible and should rightly make good what the contractor owes to the innocent people of Vatoa.

I am raising this matter with the Government since these types of injustice do not create a positive image of Government. The Government should urgently look into the matter and put to rest the plight of the Vatoa villagers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government's 20 year Development Plan provides that 'domestic air services will be enhanced to support the growth in the tourism industry and more-efficient mobility of all passengers within the country'. The Plan also provides that in the next five years, Government will allocate funding to upgrade and maintain domestic airports. Furthermore, the Plan also provides that Government will continue to subsidize domestic flights.

The airstrip in Ono-i-Lau has taken up a big part of the arable land where our forefathers cultivated dalo, yam, and other root crops. Their sacrifice was on the understanding that the people of Ono-i-Lau would be serviced by plane on a regular basis. They were misled. The airstrip is a white elephant and the people have not been compensated for the loss of their farmland. The Ono-i-Lau community is now convinced that the airstrip was primarily meant to be an outpost for surveillance purposes, but as it has been replaced by satellite and new technology, the original intent for the airport is no longer applicable.

The people of Ono-i-Lau are disadvantaged because of their isolation. The regular air service to the island provides connectivity and accords the opportunity for working people of Ono-i-Lau to visit their *yavutu* and make it back to Suva within their leave period, otherwise they will be victims of the unreliable shipping services to the island. I call on the Government to restore the air services to Ono-i-Lau as soon as possible and to make this years' Christmas a happy and a memorable one for the islanders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency's Address mentioned about the 'expanding telecommunications into rural areas and remote communities with the view of eliminating location as a barrier to participation in our growing economy'. The Government's intention is welcomed. However, at this point, I wish to remind the Government about the Prime Minister's unfulfilled promise to the people of Vanuabalavu.

After *TC Winston* blew away the Vodafone tower at Mavana, he said that it will be rebuilt soon. Years have passed and nothing has been done. The Minister responsible for communication had come up with a lot of excuses on why the tower has not been rebuilt. Unfulfilled promises will remain as such in the minds and the views of Vanuabalavu people. Honourable Prime Minister, make good your promise to the people of Vanuabalavu or write to the people of Vanuabalavu to explain the reason why your promise has not been honoured. If you will not do that, then I join the Opposition Leader to call on you to resign to allow election of a new Government that can honour promises.

As we draw nearer to our 50th anniversary of our independence, we should remember those that have sacrificed and contributed much to what Fiji is today.

I feel that we have failed in the past to recognise landowners who have given up their land to provide homes, farming areas, land for schools, land for churches and places of worship. These landowners have deprived themselves of commercial returns for their land and have, in effect, taken up the Government responsibilities in the area of housing development, access to adequate food, education and water.

The Yavusa *Matanikorovatu* in Kalabu, Naitasiri has given land to 213 families from all over Fiji who have built their homes in Tovata, not to mention those in Vatuyalewa and Delaidogo, some of whom have been there for over 50 years. These families do not pay rent but are occasionally levied amounts to pay towards the development of the village in Kalabo and for the welfare of its people which they are now a part of.

I would recommend to the Government to consider recognising these landowners and others around Fiji in our commemoration of the 50th anniversary of independence. At this juncture, I would like to convey to the *Liuliu ni Yavusa Matanikorovatu* and his *yavusa*, my condolence for the sad loss of the *Radini* Kalabo.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to His Excellency's Address.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Anare Jale for his contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker of the Parliament, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen. I rise to contribute to the debate on His Excellency, the President's address to the 2019/2020 opening session of the Parliament.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to sincerely thank His Excellency, the President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote for such a gracious and inspiring speech to our nation. Inspiring indeed as many of the issues covered in his speech touch upon and reflect our daily lives and too often, we fail to realise how the goals set by our Government are successfully implemented. Little do we realise and indeed understand that we as individuals, families and communities also have a major part to play in achieving these goals. Development as it has been shown is always a combination of government and citizens efforts.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will be touching on some of these issues in my address today. One year ago, during my inaugural speech in this august House, I gave the reason why my family and I returned to Fiji to resettle

after two decades of being abroad, working for the United Nations system more particularly the World Health Organisation (WHO). I think it is appropriate to repeat this today after listening to several testimonies from our children of Fiji on the 2013 Constitution as elaborated in His Excellency, the President's address.

The 2013 Constitution made Fiji proud. It gave us a common identity to be called Fijians as would any other citizen of any other country will tell you, it did not discriminate in any manner, be it colour, creed, ethnicity or religion. This is always in the deepest minds of our family and I also see the same among the members of the community we live in. His Excellency, the President also mentioned the importance of quality leadership in shaping our nation's future and I would also like to endorse this by saying that our Honourable Prime Minister, Josaia Bainimarama has been blessed with and continues to demonstrate these qualities as he takes the nation forward, beyond Fiji and into the international realm. Indeed, you all will recall the effective leadership he provided as the country chaired the Conference of Parties (COP) 23 which he has maintained in the region after the tenure of Fiji as Chair of COP 23.

I am proud and happy that I joined politics under his leadership and his team. The past year of my political life has taught me so many positive lessons and given me experiences that I am able to contribute for the betterment of our community.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as a Member of two important Standing Committees of Parliament namely, Justice, Law and Human Rights, and Foreign Affairs and Defence, I have had an enviable and tremendous opportunity to interact with people of all walks of life including the grassroots and key stakeholders who support the development of our nation. This taught me how important it is to share information, be transparent and accountable to our people be it in formulating legislation or implementing policies that affect the lives of our people. I think all of us as leaders in our community have an important role to play in this regard and together contribute in undertaking assessment of implemented policies to provide evidence in strengthening our services.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Government over the past year, has continued to provide and improve on existing infrastructure and services to strengthen the economy and further improve the lives of our people. Examples of this include building of new roads and improvement of existing roads to enhance access to essential services such as health and education, as well as open up new markets for our rural farmers.

On the other hand, we have also seen some negative effects of these developments due to lack of responsible participation by our people in the National Road Safety Programme. Irresponsible driving has led to an increase in road traffic accidents resulting in serious injuries and even death. This must be a major cause of concern to us all as it brings unnecessary burden on our hospitals and increases the cost of health services. Loss of productivity and loss to the economy is also substantial.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of asking how we can prevent these accidents people are blaming the police and the Government for failing to take action on careless drivers. Indeed it is important that as citizens, we take ownership and change our attitude, behaviour and practices in aspects of our lives that can contribute to national development. These include, for example, avoidance of alcohol drinking while driving, observing speed limits, wearing seat belts, operating properly fitted vehicles and abiding by the regulations of the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

As responsible citizens these behaviours should be adopted and constantly displayed, rather than asking for enforcement of law by the Government. And on this note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I recall the attention of this august House to the words of the late President Kennedy of the United States of America when he called upon citizens, and I quote: 'Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country'. And people really can do more for the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to give an example where people can choose and do more to contribute towards health and wellbeing of our society. The rising incidence of Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and preventable cancers is a good example where the full participation of people is needed if we are to control these dreaded problems but rather than asking Government to provide costly medicine, sophisticated diagnostics and treatment, people should be asking themselves as to what they can contribute to reduce these problems.

Fiji is blessed with tropical climate where with little effort, healthy fruits and vegetables can be grown at our backyards. The Ministry of Agriculture is providing all the support that is needed in terms of seedlings and fertilizers to support us grow this.

We all have bits of land at our backyards, yet we are complacent, and keep complaining to Government that the prices are too high for the imported fruits and vegetable rather than growing and consuming our own. Active participation of people is vital not only for improving their own and families' lives, but also to contribute towards the national effort to develop our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as leaders in our community, we can play a key role in changing the knowledge, attitude, behaviour and practices of our community. We can also positively link this to the overall goal of our Government, to improve the lives of our people and community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to give an example of how we are promoting active participation of our people in improving our own lifestyle in the province of Nadroga, the beautiful province where I live. A group of interested people from all sectors of the community gathered together and identified the need to improve, beautify, keep clean, and mitigate the effects of climate change on our coastal area, extending from Korotogo to Muasara Point, a four-kilometre distance.

The project will see the cleaning of beachfront areas, building footpaths and bicycle tracks, planting trees, building water and sanitation and garbage disposal facilities, and lighting. Once developed, the area will also serve as a recreational area for children and their families, and a place for physical fitness. Once people start using this, it will significantly contribute towards risk reduction for Non-Communicable Diseases as well.

The positive thing about this project is that, this is a community-based initiative by the people, for the people of Nadroga and the rest of the nation. The Committee is currently involved in bringing more stakeholders on board and mobilise resources to implement the project. The project, once completed, will be similar to what people enjoy here in Suva by visiting the Nasese beachfront area.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have given some examples of how people can actively participate in improving their own lifestyles and greatly contribute to the ongoing efforts of our Government in various sectors with the aim of improving our life. I hope more of such efforts can be initiated and documented in the future around Fiji.

With those few words, I fully support His Excellency the President for this auspicious Address. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would also want to take this opportunity to wish you all the season's greetings and a Merry Christmas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro T.V. Kepa. You have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate on His Excellency's Address for the Opening of this new session of Parliament. We all remember Mr. Speaker, Sir, the nursery rhyme about Old Mother Hubbard who went to her cupboard and finding it bare.

After studying the Address and its presentation of the Government's programmes, I declare there is another cupboard that is bare, very bare. It belongs to those opposite us in this House, because FijiFirst has no focused Action Plan, no new ideas and no new initiatives to lift Fiji from what we, and many others, see as a low point in its history.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at the sad state of the nation, we have to ask, what is happening to our island home? It is obvious that under this Government, Fiji has lost its way.

We, on these benches, as always stand ready to work with the other side of the House to find solutions to our pressing difficulties. The people, Sir, are entitled to this.

The Opposition has many ideas for taking Fiji into an era of prosperity, freedom and national fulfilment. But, our experience so far, Sir, is that the Government is too proud, too high-handed, too inward-looking and too arrogant to form a sensible accommodation with us to rescue Fiji.

They always know best and they are always right. But the problem is that, they do not know what is best and they have proved consistently that they are usually wrong. Their cupboard is bare, the shelves are empty and there are no new ideas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, wherever we look, we see evidence that the FijiFirst leadership has landed us in deep trouble. Listening to the radio, watching television, reading the papers, bad news is unprecedented. "Never ever before" in FijiFirst's famous words, have human rights been so limited and suppressed, and rising crime threatens the entire population, including resident foreign diplomats.

The latest horror show is the emergence of a gangster-style drug industry providing methamphetamine or ice, spiked with rat poison. Yes, that is right, Mr. Speaker, Sir, rat poison! And not only rat poison, it is also being mixed with butane, a substance found in sprays or aerosols which can cause drowsiness, suffocation, heart palpitations, temporary memory loss or even death when inhaled typically by sudden sniffing. What is happening to our country, Sir? One wonders, where have we gone wrong? Why are people doing this to themselves and to others?

Now, on to wages, Sir, the wages of many workers are low. Never ever before have wages, much of it below the formal minimum wage, been so bad. Now, we hear that the Honourable Minister is stating that they are beginning to look at minimum wage.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- All right, enough.

I hope the results will take more than six months to come out, Sir, and not just before the 2022 Elections. So I hope it comes out before that, as jobs are scarce and unprecedented high levels of poverty are increasing. Business confidence has dropped, as sales and income suffer from a decline in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the sugar industry is broke and on life support from the taxpayers, why is the Government hiring (with due respect to Vanuatu) 19 nationals as cancutters with the likelihood of more coming in, in the future when there is already high unemployment in Fiji. Why is the Government not hiring the local people and giving them the same rates and conditions as people being hired from overseas? No wonder the Government has a big cashflow problem because of its own mismanagement and it has to scramble for every dollar. And because of this maladministration and inefficiency, it has had to make brutal cutbacks in crucial spending.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji since privatisation from the Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) to Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) and Public Works Department (PWD) to Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), it has become a land of frequent power and water cuts, and roads pitted with dangerous potholes which the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) cannot repair on time. Consumers have voiced their concerns, Sir, on how expensive and difficult it is to make a complaint on their supposedly toll free number, whilst being passed from pillar to post without any improvement in services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is common knowledge that 80 percent of all deaths in Fiji are from NCDs or lifestyle diseases. That is probably the highest rate in the world. I have seen it in my own village, Sir, in Rewa, that people are dying young. Very few are living beyond 70 years, which means that in this House, only 10 (if the statistics is correct) will live beyond 70 years.

These statistics are, indeed, frightening, Sir, not only are people not living to 70 years, but hundreds of limbs have to be amputated annually. Doctors say that in every eight hours, there is some form of amputation.

This disfigurement and suffering is shocking and unprecedented in our history. It is now becoming uncommon and rare to visit a village or community where the inhabitants have all their limbs intact. What will the situation be like, Sir, in five or ten years' time? I know it is frightening, is it not?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Make sure you live to 70.

This incomplete chronicle or failure and hazard is depressing and it gives me no pleasure to recite it, but it is the truth and it should not be hidden. It is more than alarming that the FijiFirst Government, through the Address of His Excellency, fails to offer a new vision and blueprint to save the country from the peril it is in. What is required now, Sir?

Right now is a great national economic and social summit attended by parliamentarians, other delegates, leaders and other stakeholders from every sector of society, representing diverse viewpoints. They would confront all the pressing issues facing the nation and seek consensus on the best way for tackling them, guided by the national interest. Then it would be up to Parliament to do its work based on the summit outcomes.

This, Sir, would be an historic step towards inclusiveness we all seek. It would take statesmanship and skill to make it happen and to manage the agenda. We must act for the sake of Fiji, for the sake of the current and future generations, and for the sake of putting things right in our troubled land. We can do this, Sir, given our commitment and readiness to overcome differences and unite for a common purpose.

Again, in here, Sir, I call for the appointment of an independent Education Commission to consider the substantial challenges and shortcomings in the education system. There are many issues, including curriculum content, training, organisation, fractured relationships between stakeholders, school discipline and morale of students and teachers. Apart from ensuring that we are equipping the children and older students to lead productive lives, more effort is required to ensure that what is taught in the schools and institutions of higher learning meets the needs of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an interesting study I read about recently was carried out by Mr. Rajesh Krishna, the Principal of Swami Vivekananda College in Nadi, for his Masters in Educational Leadership. It is titled, 'Happy School for Quality Students', and this involved schools in the Western Division which revealed that 64 percent of children and teachers were not happy.

The study noted that students were faced with enormous pressure to compete and that too much emphasis was placed on academic content and exam scores. The study, Sir, noted that the curriculum was also outdated, not factoring in that information technology is to help prepare for career advancement by providing the technical knowledge and communications, critical thinking and creative skills relevant to the modern workplace.

The curriculum, Sir, was very narrow with so much focus on exam results, was not tapping on every child's talent, where the system was going in only one direction towards the exam system. At the end of the year, only the 1st, 2nd and 3rd placed students were awarded recognition. On the other end, artistically talented students, who are gifted in other aspects and areas are left by the wayside, and this is the majority of students in any one class.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- What did you do when you were there?

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Why do you then wonder? Mr. Speaker, Sir, we did have an Education Commission to work with which you threw out the window? You did nothing

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Wait, listen, listen *mada*, I am coming to you. Why do you then wonder, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the high incidence of bullying, truancy, drugs and other disciplinary problems being highlighted in the schools? The study also found that those incidents were carried out mostly by students who are not academically gifted as the curriculum does not cater for their needs. They become frustrated, unable to cope and get up to mischief, cause trouble and generally misbehave.

When you focus on exams, Sir, that character-building aspect so badly needed for bringing up children holistically is left out and totally omitted. Children's potential is unidentified, unrecognised and totally ignored. So what happens then, Sir? This is where it gets interesting, in that the study explains in part why it is that suddenly there is a spike in all types of misdemeanour, misbehaviour and where unprecedented levels of indiscipline are taking place in the schools and out in the community. This is because, Sir, we have been placing the wrong emphasis on education.

If only 950 local students and 20 overseas students are awarded Toppers Scholarship annually and 950 for TELS, whilst there are thousands, Sir, out there missing out, why do you think there is now such a strong correlation to incidents of crime. Yes, these thousands of students are left out as if they are of no consequence, no use, *sega na betena*. They cannot get anything, Sir, no crumbs from anywhere. At least with PSC, FAB and Multi-Ethnic Scholarships, they were able to get something. So the Government, Sir, has to answer and take responsibility for what has been happening for the past 12 years in terms of the education system and the high levels of crime.

In a moment of clarity in 2014, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the former Honourable Minister for Education stated that there would be an Education Commission but suddenly he did a u-turn. Mr. Speaker, why did he do a u-turn? So I am advocating in the absence of the FijiFirst coming up with it, they do not know how badly needed it is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and with due respect to the Honourable Reddy and the Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum (both of them were Former Education Ministers), they have no idea at all - having lost the plot as to what is required to overhaul the education system, and they have been the problem, Sir, rather than the solution.

Some teachers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are concerned about their conditions of employment in terms of determination for salary increase. I am bringing this to your notice, as the draft contract does not include the information they are required to sign as a part of their contracts, and this is just one of the concerns of teachers.

Now I come to the indigenous population, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Much of what was their inheritance have been taken from them through the decrees of 2007 onwards to what is now included in the 2013 Constitution, which only two people knew about as this was imposed on all of us. With the high levels of taxation: VAT at 9 percent, ECAL at 10 percent and STTC at 6 percent, together with the imposition of various other licences on the grassroots people who are trying to feed their families on a subsistence level, life is not easy.

In addition, with the decrease in the 2019-2020 Budget, the indigenous have had to find the means to subsidise the operations of their Provincial Councils. This is because the Government can only pay the subvention which is the wages and salaries of the Provincial Office staff, and that is 40 percent, this is in Rewa, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

The villagers, existing already at subsistence level have to pay 20 percent of the operating cost and this is by means of many *solis* that they have to go through before they can come up with the 20 percent to pay for the operating costs and the balance of 40 percent is sourced from their investments in Fijian Holdings Limited (FHL) Unit Trust, et cetera. This means, Sir, that the indigenous, having ownership of their resources removed from them through various decrees, including the 2013 Constitution, also having to pay high levels of national tax and then having to subsidise their provincial administration are amongst the poorest of the poor. They are often ridiculed as “asset rich and cash poor”. They are doubly taxed by the Central Government and the provincial administration. No wonder, Sir, they are the poorest of the poor because the economy which is designed to serve the people, is instead designed to serve the economy.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the President's speech asserts that Fiji is now truly democratic and that democratic ideals are taking hold in the hearts and minds of the people. It hails a surging civic awareness. It is typical, Sir, of the hypocrisy marking this Government that in its new plan for administering our municipalities, it has again tossed the democracy aside. At the same time, it has ignored one of the most praiseworthy expressions of the civic awareness it so admires. I speak of those, Sir, who wish to serve their communities by offering themselves to the ratepayers for elections to town and city councils. Those who win the confidence of the local electorate at the ballot box have a true mandate. But instead of going the democratic way embraced in the Constitution they so revere, the Government has again chosen this dictatorship. This is despite an earlier promise that municipal elections would be held.

The new Administrators are handpicked. They will therefore be seen as partisan servants of FijiFirst. Although they may be well-meaning, sincere and able, they are not democratically-endorsed by the citizens and the ratepayers of the municipalities and not accountable to them. They are being used by a dictatorship government and we will find out very quickly if they step out of line.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with sentiments on this side expressed earlier and also by the statement provided by the Leader of the Opposition on the Grace Roads issue. We, Sir, in my part of Rewa, did sign a 5-year contract with them for rice planting in Burebasaga in Rewa. However, earlier this year that contract was mutually terminated and today, we have nothing more to do with Grace Roads.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was going to come to climate change but just in conclusion, there is something else I wish to ask the Prime Minister (he is not here): Everyone in Fiji is familiar with the circumstances of his assault on the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. Up to 500,000 people, Sir, probably viewed the video of the Prime Minister marching angrily up to Pio, grabbing his lapel and pushing him, it was a disgraceful incident. What then transpired was also a disgrace. The Prime Minister issued an apology, this was enough for him to escape without any punishment at all. Honourable Pio refused to apologise on the basis that he felt he had done nothing wrong, so he was sent away from this House for six months.

The police were obviously reluctant to act against the Prime Minister. They sent one report of the incident to the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) who returned it, saying that it was inadequate. The police then sent

another report. The DPP declined to prosecute on the grounds, as I recollect, that the matter had been dealt with by Parliament, therefore in this incident, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the attacker gets off free while the victim is suspended from this House.

In His Excellency's Address, there is mention of common and equal citizenship. I would like the Prime Minister to say whether he thinks the outcome of his assault on Honourable Pio is an example of common and equal citizenship and equality before the law. I also ask you, Sir, in conclusion, to tell us whether he was ever personally interviewed by the police?

Finally, assault in Fiji is common. Does the Honourable Prime Minister agree that the message from his incident is that people can assault others and get away with it, and that what he did was basically all right because it is now a common belief with the people of this country?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this case the cupboard is bare, and I do not support this motion before the House.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa for the contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate and I give the floor to the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and to each and everyone of you present here today, at home and those listening via other mediums: *Bula*, good afternoon, *ram ram*, *sat shri akaal* and *asalaam alaykum*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this afternoon to convey my wholehearted support to His Excellency the President's speech for the opening of 2019/2020 Session of Parliament, and I am being honoured to contribute.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our 2013 Constitution is a landmark achievement for a great nation that has ensured that we all are equal and at the same time guaranteeing opportunities for all. It has also laid a solid foundation for the future growth and progress of our nation. It has also given great hope for our younger generation to forge ahead with much vigour and enthusiasm as this great Constitution supports them in every way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as His Excellency has stated in his eloquent speech that the Parliament Standing Committees play a pivotal role in ensuring that opinions and ideas are brought to light and actioning thus paving way for greater participation and inclusiveness of our citizens. As His Excellency has stated that Committee Members must engage with the public to ensure greater achievement. As a result, our Standing Committee on Natural Resources, on a number of occasions, had done public consultations and reported to this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by His Excellency that our rural development programmes are on the forefront of the Government's agenda, more roads, bridges and roadside stalls have been built to ensure our citizens get better access to our towns and cities for the purpose of business and also doing business in the locality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on an unprecedented scale, our landowners have been engaged to ensure that their land is used productively thus benefitting their own communities and households. It has also given them opportunity to actively participate in the nation's economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our leap towards technological advancement to digitise Fiji has been embraced with open arms by our responsible citizens. It has provided a great platform for our young entrepreneurs to do business in a smart way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our relatively though small economy has maintained a steady growth. Our role as Honourable Members of this House is to give positive feedbacks to the Members of the public who are curious to know the developments in our economy and impact of measures taken. As rightly pointed out by His Excellency that we must not politicized our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is noteworthy to say that our younger generation has seized the opportunity to start new business, taking advantage of the many tailor-made initiatives policies and programmes that enables our youth to contribute to our nation's economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by His Excellency we are all looking forward to the 50th Anniversary of our Independence. As rightly pointed out, it will give us a great chance to ponder on our journey as a nation and the lessons learnt. At the same it will give us a great opportunity to celebrate our success stories.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our nation has a strong economic policy and planning that we wish to see our economy prosper in the near future. The Honourable Prime Minister has strengthened our relationships with the emerging powers of Asia such as China and India. The Honourable Prime Minister ensured that we take an active stance on climate change and do our best to ensure the health of this planet for generations to come is maintained. He also ensured that we continue to create opportunities for all Fijians by investing wisely in education, training and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have played a pivotal role in climate change issues and our Honourable Prime Minister has gained respect and adoration not only in the Pacific region but on a global scale as well. With the support and cooperation from our Pacific neighbours, we have played a leading role in enacting the Climate Change Law. Also our beloved citizens have played an important role in giving valuable ideas in the national consultations in the Climate Change Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally I believe we can take our nation to new heights if we are united and work together rather than criticizing the Government's effort and hard work in taking this nation to another level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again I thank His Excellency the President and all Fijians of our beloved nation. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, the hour moves on. I intend to finish the list of speakers for today, but in order to do that, we will have to sit beyond time and I would like to give the floor to the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move the Suspension of Standing Orders.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the speakers on the batting order provided for today.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is 3.30 p.m. and we still have three listed under today's Order Paper; the Honourable Kuridrani, the Honourable Cdr. Semi Koroilavesau and the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu to deliver their statements and thus the motion for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today, *vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. There does not seem to be any indication from anywhere. Honourable Members we will now vote on this. Anyone opposing?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- And therefore in agreement to sit beyond 4.30 this afternoon.

Honourable Members now that we have done that, we will adjourn for afternoon tea so you can enjoy your afternoon tea then we will come back and face the Honourable Kuridrani.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.28 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.03 p.m.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS
BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members we will now continue with the debate on His Excellency the President's Address and I now give the floor to the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I rise to respond to His Excellency the President's Address with the Members of Parliament and the citizens of the beloved nation Fiji, whilst opening this Parliament Session of 2019 to 2020 on 12th November, 2019. I would like to thank His Excellency the President for his opening Address and his contribution to our country in his capacity as the head of our nation and in particular the period that I became a member of this Parliament which was from November 2018 to the present.

Mr. Speaker Sir, before I progress further to present on my allocated topic, I would firstly like to share my first 12 months experience as a member of this august House. First of all, I would like to acknowledge my God Jesus Christ for without whom I would not be standing here and delivering this response today. One year on from being elected into this Parliament, I have had a great privilege of meeting and learning from people from all walks of life.

I have taken trips to different parts of Fiji, trips to Vanua Levu, Naitasiri, Namosi, Navosa, Nadarivatu, Lautoka amongst many others and these trips have allowed me the opportunity to speak with proud and passionate Fijians who have continually embrace in vigour every day their family responsibilities, their work responsibilities, their religious responsibilities and the traditional responsibilities regardless of the circumstances that life throws at them.

These are the people that continue to find the silver lining, a reason to smile, whilst sharing their stories of struggles, dreams, fears, setbacks, hopes and aspirations for a better Fiji of tomorrow. In my 12 months journey as a Member of this august House, I am assured that it is within the plight of the people that I have met in this journey and the plight of those that I represent that gives me a greater meaning and purpose to standing here today.

I have also had the privilege of been a member of the Economic Affairs Standing Committee and every day I feel rewarded that I have a unique opportunity to contribute positively to the Economic Affairs of our nation, by reading, listening to challenging, influencing and reviewing reports, presentation, outcomes and administration of the different Departments within the Committee's portfolio of responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker Sir, it has been my greatest honour to serve this country for the last 12 months and I look forward to what the future unfolds. Being a Member of this Parliament is a privilege and I do not take for granted but it is also the most challenging role that I have ever encountered in my 38 years of professional career.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the challenge does not come from my constituency of Navosa-i-Wai, which includes the trails of villages and settlements along the Coral Coast beginning from Namatakula Village all the way to the Sigatoka River banks, up to the Navosa Highlands of Yalavou and Koroinasau and over the seas to the island of Vatulele, despite the 300 kilometres stretch of gravel road, muddy tracks, feeder roads and high seas.

Nor, does the challenge lie in my political party, SODELPA although there have been some disagreements within the party, they have been resolved through dialogue and consensus. This shows that democracy is alive and well in the Party and we have remained true to our motto of *Leadership that Listens*.

Mr. Speaker Sir, based on my 12 months of experience, the greatest challenge has been bearing witness to the sharp rise in the Fiji's social, economic and political problems as a result of this Government's incompetency, mismanagement and self-centeredness. For example:

- The imposed Constitution that boasts unity, only brings division;
- The Parliament Standing Orders are biased and serve to protect only the interest of the Government;
- There is lack and transparency and accountability by the leaders;
- There is constant suppression and marginalisation of indigenous rights;
- There is deteriorating law and order;
- Corruption has increased as my colleague the Honourable Lynda Tabuya mentioned this morning of the Grace Road issue;
- Nepotism has been shocking.

Mr. Speaker Sir, past governments have provided a better living standard for the people of this country. In the past we have had law and order. By this I mean, rates of crime were lower than what it is today because citizens generally abide by the law and more importantly no one was above the law, much different to how we have it today.

During the reign of past governments, there was independence of State institutions, economic growth was thriving, cost of living was affordable, climate of doing business was positive and there were not many fancy speeches on climate change, but, there was less environmental degradation and more protection. There was more respect and protection of people's human rights, there was freedom of celebration of ethnic diversity and different cultures and the indigenous people lived peacefully amongst all different ethnic members of our communities without the pressure of having to constantly fight for and defend their culture, language and resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on what I have observed and learned so far, this Government is doing the complete opposite to what past governments have done and achieved in the past and I will elaborate on this later.

This is the worst performing Government since Fiji's Independence in 1970. I say this with confidence because I witness citizens struggling every day to make ends meet regardless of their pay packet. The struggle to survive in Fiji today does not differentiate between white-collar and blue-collar jobs anymore, it is present at all levels of society. Talk to the sugarcane farmers to understand this, talk to the nurses who have not been paid overtime since August and talk to the people Naigani Island who are still living in tents waiting for the balance of building materials to be supplied, four years after *TC Winston*.

There is only a very small percentage of people in Fiji who can afford to live in luxury and go to bed without having to worry about surviving the next day. This percentage includes our Government Ministers who enjoy huge pay cheques to make public appearance all over Fiji and around the world, whilst everyone in their Ministry gets work done for them. It includes our Prime Minister with his extravagant travel allowance on top of his pay and judging from amount of days he has spent overseas, this year alone we can be sure that he is a very content man. This includes expatriates who have come in to take the position of qualified locals, some of them even getting paid more than the Prime Minister.

This also includes various high ranking officers, for example, my *tauvu* from Kadavu, the Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service whose salary slip was recently circulated on social media, complete with letterhead and the signature of the authorising officer and if that has any truth to it, then my point on this subject has been confirmed.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I refer to the Address by His Excellency the President and I am disappointed that the speech writers had forced him to lie by parading the so-called achievements of this Government with their amplified figures that are a far cry from reality, thus misinforming the people of Fiji in the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to elaborate further on the President's Address. His Excellency the President said that we should not politicise our economy as this will and I quote: "... threat to our economic prospects that could prove far more damaging than any global headwinds on the horizon." This has been the norm of this Government though, to direct the blame to the people for their failures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the deteriorating state of our economy is a political issue which should be kept under close scrutiny and monitored by politicians, stakeholders, the media and every concerned citizen since it will determine the wellbeing of our people and the nation as a whole. His Excellency the President further stated that we need to and I quote: "stay true to proven management that has carried our economy to historic strengthen."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wonder whether His Excellency the President understood the statement, after all the reality on the ground shows otherwise. What economic strength is His Excellency referring to? Is it the low wage rate of \$2.68 per hour?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Tell them.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Is it the \$800 million reduction in the 2019-2020 Budget? Or is it the high cost of living? Or increased poverty? Is it the increase in squatter settlements or the higher unemployment rate? Is it the delayed salary payments for teachers and nurses or is it the non-payment of overtime for nurses since August this year? Is it the non-payment of meal allowance to nurses despite repeated promises of payments? Is it the increase in drug use and crimes rate? Is it the *TC Winston* victims who are still waiting for housing materials as they have been promised or is it the poor infrastructure of public facilities such as hospitals, health centers, roads and jetties? Is it the increase of ECAL charge on plastic bags from 20 cents to 50 cents? After all, ECAL on white goods only further punishes the poor. Or is it economic strength in the increase of Births and Marriage Certificate costs?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the realities that I have just mentioned are not signs of economic strength. They are signs of struggling economy, a Government pitching money from anywhere and anyhow to keep our economy afloat.

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency further stated that he watched with growing pride the conduct of our elected leaders. Does this mean that His Excellency watched with growing pride the conduct of the Honourable Prime Minister when he assaulted the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua? Does His Excellency condone the assault by watching with growing pride the offender of the assault, walking away free, while the victims is suspended for six months? What about the conduct of the Honourable Minister for Economy? Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is incompetent and mismanages our economy, resulting in major variations in economic growth forecast.

In November 2018, the Honourable Minister for Economy projected a 3.4 percent economic growth. In May 2019, this had declined to 2.7 percent and on 7th November, 2019, the Reserve Bank of Fiji had revised this further and reduced it to 1 percent. These variations happened all in one year and it confirmed that the Honourable Minister for Economy had been lying all along behind his well-articulated speeches. His speeches cannot hide the truth any further. What then does His Excellency mean by good management, good conduct and economic strength?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government must admit the truth. The Honourable Minister for Economy has failed in his duty to properly manage our economy. Instead, he has made a mess out of it and should be held responsible and be accountable to the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Sugar and Waterways, and it is my duty to analyse the performance of my respective portfolios against this so-called Boom Economy. His Excellency the President had stated in his Address, and I quote from page 4 of the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard*:

“...Fiji's progress over the past decade is owed to our 10- years unbroken streak of economic growth.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency failed to mention any figures to support his claim of steady economic growth or perhaps, they were deliberately omitted. Since His Excellency the President has failed to provide any figures, then I will provide it for this honourable House today.

The average economic growth over the past 10 years was around 1 percent and this is considered as a 'no growth' in practical economical terms since the economy is driven by consumption and public spending, heavy borrowing and reckless spending.

In agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my first glance at the performance of the Ministry of Agriculture gives me an impression that the Honourable Minister is incompetent. This is a result that the Honourable Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has not been able to update the Ministry's Annual Report since 2013 and I feel that:

- the Green Economy concept has failed miserably;
- agriculture continues to remain stagnant with its 8 percent contribution to our GDP, minus sugar;
- investments made in the agricultural sector have gone wrong and were purely political for electoral purposes other than economic;
- poor budgetary measures for resource-based sectors has kept our resource-based sector limping behind;
- no new crop has been added to diversify our agricultural sector, nor much done to revitalise the existing agro-based industries;
- no initiatives were provided for the development of high-value crops, such cocoa and vanilla; and
- failure to replicate the successful Tutu Farming concept in other parts of Fiji.

On sugar, whilst still on the economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to mention the sugar industry because of its importance and contribution to our economy and our nation. Let us not forget the number of livelihoods that are dependent on this legendary industry, whose contribution to the economy cannot be denied.

The statistics are not ours or theirs, but from the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) which skins the cat to the bone and illustrates the fact that under the FijiFirst Government, the sugar industry is gradually but surely staggering towards its death. And no one has proven this beyond all reasonable doubt than the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry in the answer that he provided to this House to Oral Question No. 1/2019 in February this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the first revelation made by the Honourable Prime Minister is in relation to the yield per hectare which he tags as the desirable average of 50 tonnes per hectare. But the fact of the matter is, our per hectare yield was 55 tonnes in the Alliance era and at an average of 50 tonnes in the SVT and SDL era, which has now been reduced to less than 44 tonnes per hectare under the FijiFirst Government. If someone were to make conclusion from this statistics supplied by the FSC, this proves that the sugar industry is not doing well.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one can deny the fact that we have made substantial investments in the sugar industry under the various policies and programmes floated by this Government. But all these investments have failed to produce the desired results as illustrated a moment ago. That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me question the work of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF), pertaining to the following:

- What has the Institute done to improve the quality of cane?
- What has the Institute done to develop and introduce new varieties of cane?
- What has the Institute done to improve the Tonnes of Cane to Tonnes of Sugar (TCTS) production?
- What has the Institute done to improve the per hectare cane production?
- What has the Institute done to improve the soil composition and structure of those land under cane cultivation?

It is apparent that the SRIF is infested with fat cats, who are thriving at the expense of the interests of cane growers and have failed miserably in their research and development works to salvage the ailing sugar industry.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had numerous reforms of the sugar industry in Fiji since the inception of the industry, the last one being commissioned in 2010 which resulted in the production of the *Deloitte Report*. It would be interesting to find out from the Honourable Prime Minister, who is also the Minister for the sugar industry to inform this House as to the status of the implementation of the recommendations of the *Deloitte Report*, or is the Report still stuck in his little pocket which he was too quick to show to the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party in this House some time ago when talking about the sugar industry?

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, talking about reforms, the first comprehensive review and restructure of the sugar industry that was ever conducted in Fiji was in 1984 and it resulted in the establishment and empowerment of the:

- Sugar Industry Act;
- Master Award and the mechanisms to deal with the Master Award;
- Sugar Cane Growers Council;
- Sugar Commission of Fiji;
- Sugar Industry Tribunal;
- Cane Growers Fund Authority;
- Sugar Research Institute of Fiji;
- Mill Area Committees and Cane Harvest Gangs; and
- Recognition of Cane Growers Industrial Associations.

It is a pity, Sir, that the Military regime from 2006 to 2014 and the FijiFirst Government since 2014, has gone on a rampage to dismantle every democratic ideal and principle which these institutions and structures were established upon, citing politics as the reason being the cause of the downfall of the sugar industry. I beg to differ from the very narrow view. Politics in the sugar industry was rife in 1986 when we had the record production of more than 546,000 tonnes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude my response today, I fully endorse the call by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to:

1. Demand that this Government resign with immediate effect, having lost the faith and trust of the Fijian people; and
2. Call for fresh elections to elect a new Parliament and Government.

I must state that the Address from the throne this year fails to live up to the expectations of our people. Thank you, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Kuridrani for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Minister for Fisheries, the Honourable Semi Koroilavesau. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of this august House; please, allow me to share with this august House what we all need to know when it comes to sustaining our natural resources which is inclusive of fisheries.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, recent publication shows that the world's population of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles declined by 58 percent between 1970 and 2012. This is mainly due to human-induced activities that is unsustainable, and does not take into consideration the need to allow for our shared resources to regenerate.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the best available science predicts that by 2020, loss of our resources will soar to 67 percent. That is just a few weeks away. We have great challenges ahead of us. So it is my humble view that we cannot ignore the fact that everyone has a role to play.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to make my contribution in supporting the Opening Address of His Excellency the President, Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konrote, where he stated and I quote:

“In this Chamber, you will deliver the solutions to great challenges. You are not here to guard your political fortunes or make theatre out of political discourse. You are each here to serve as guardians of every Fijian's well-being. No matter which side of the Chamber you sit, you must keep the following questions in your minds:

- Are you speaking in the national interest or are you speaking in the interest of self or party?
- Are you advocating to advance our people's collective good or for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many?
- Are you speaking the truth or are you bending the truth to serve a political end?”

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to repeat this and with your indulgence, please, I quote:

“In this Chamber, you will deliver the solutions to great challenges. You are not here to guard your political fortunes or make theatre out of political discourse. You are each here to serve as guardians of every Fijian's well-being. No matter which side of the Chamber you sit, you must keep the following questions in your minds:

- Are you speaking in the national interest or are you speaking in the interest of self or party?
- Are you advocating to advance our people's collective good or for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many?
- Are you speaking the truth or are you bending the truth to serve a political end?”

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in my statement this afternoon, I will reflect on the work carried out by the Ministry of Fisheries in relation to the important aspects raised by His Excellency the President. This will cover the work that we have carried out in the last 12 months and plans laid out in our 5 to 10 Year Strategic Plan.

With those words, Honourable Speaker, I would like to assure this august House that the Ministry of Fisheries is determined to keep supporting the initiatives and programmes to help our future generation, but we cannot do this alone.

Support is needed at all levels within our society to achieve greatness. This includes; myself, the Honourable Members of the FijiFirst Government, the Honourable Members of the Opposition and all Fijians, irrespective of age, race, gender or religion. A collective and holistic approach is needed to inspire progress and accomplish change.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, allow me to touch briefly on community engagement. Over the past 10 months, the Ministry of Fisheries have worked and dedicated its time tirelessly to reach all Fijians, irrespective of their geographical position. We have travelled to Ono-i-Lau in the Lau Group to provide the much-needed service in the area that is so isolated. This is the same approach that was undertaken in the isolated island of Cikobia, Vanua Levu, in which the instalment of a solar-powered freezer now provides these communities with opportunities that reduce the cost of having to frequent the nearby reefs to harvest fish for their consumption and provide additional income for their households. With the distribution of solar freezers, stored fish can now be sold to visiting vessels and merchants providing a viable source of basic sustenance to these isolated communities. They are now able to catch with much more quantity and better quality.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to state that while this may prove basic to most of us, the fact is that what we classify as basic in urban centres, it is something that is priceless and valuable for our rural communities. The important fact that these small developments provide basic yet important steps towards the shared goals of the Fijian Government and that is sustaining the lives of all Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, over the past 12 months, I am proud to say that our team has visited a total of 50 villages in Lau, Lomaiviti, Vanua Levu including Cikobia, Naqelelevu, Yadua in Bua, Rabi, Kioa, Taveuni, Kadavu, communities around Tailevu, Ra, Ba, Nadroga, the Yasawas and Malolo, to name only a few.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, through his words, His Excellency the President indicated that "As parliamentarians, we must all serve as conduits to community engagement." With that, the Ministry of Fisheries takes to heart the role we play. Through the idea of shared democracy and the will to provide all Fijians with the support they need, I am dedicated to lead the Ministry of Fisheries in expanding these community engagements in the next 12 months.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I now wish to briefly highlight fisheries contributions to economic growth. In improving the lives of all Fijians, our 10-year economic growth has allowed the fisheries sector to grow. Fisheries, over the past 10 years, has contributed to an average of two to three percent of Fiji's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This figure is mainly a reflection of the well-documented tuna industry. As a matter of fact, the value of the fisheries sector is a lot more. The domestic circulation of fish products, the increase in value-adding and the spike in tourist arrival have led to the increase in value of fish products sold and consumed in Fiji.

In the next few months, the Ministry of Fisheries is dedicated to ensure that we continue to work with the different sectors in Fisheries to establish a robust reporting mechanism that enjoy the collation of information required to better understand the economic opportunities available within the sector. In realising this, Honourable Speaker, we would achieve a platform that allows for more decisive moments in assessing economic growth through investment opportunities.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as we embark into the decade that calls for a more sustainable approach to Fisheries Management, I would like to touch on our progress in being innovative and being knowledgeable through science. The world's developed countries are geared towards being more innovative when it comes to the sustainable use of our resources. These include innovation in technology, infrastructure and the full use of available sites. To match this important trend, Fiji is determined to work with these developed nations.

In the past few months, the Ministry of Fisheries has identified areas in which innovation will be implemented.

Through the support of the New Zealand Government, the Ministry of Fisheries will be developing a robust online site that houses a database and a web-based service platform that provides efficient support to local communities, the private sector and our partners. Through the development of a "Fisheries app.", we hope to start recording near realtime data on fish caught by fishers in our rural and urban fishing communities. This will help us identify the type of fish caught, its quantity and the value it provides to our communities and the Fijian economy.

It will also create a hub valuable scientific information reflecting species distribution within the geographical positions.

This information will allow us to make decisions when developing management measures focused on sustainable fisheries.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in the areas of infrastructure, we are determined to use a more innovative approach in the development of aquaculture.

Through our bilateral partners, innovation now is implemented in developing our aquaculture hatcheries and ponds that are cost-effective and takes into account best practices adopted from our partners in developed nations.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the first innovative approach is currently being taken in Caboni Hatchery in Ra.

In the rehabilitation of Caboni Hatchery, new designs are being incorporated in the newly completed hatchery, an algae laboratory and grow-out ponds. This will be followed by the construction on a state-of-the-art reservoir that integrates the use of renewable energy and reduce the cost of farm production.

In its completion, the Caboni Hatchery will be focussed on producing milk fish. This is a new development and will be a great achievement to Fiji's aquaculture progress.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, to briefly touch on sustainability, we all know that to keep up with the change in the development, we need to educate ourselves with priorities and issues shared in international platforms.

The role Fiji plays to voice concerns on how best to manage our ocean is one that is continuously realised in our engagement in the United Nations. In particular, our lead role in the development of the 17 United Nation Sustainable Goals, is one that should not be taken lightly and requires support and collaboration of all Fijians.

As we all know, our reefs and marine ecosystems are under threat, not just from climate change but threats of land-based pollution and over-exploitation as a result of demand from intensive commercial progress.

While we understand that communities have the rights to these resources, as Fijians and as leaders, we are to ensure that management tools are in place to protect the right of our future generations. These are the rights to the resources that we are enjoying today.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in addressing this, the Ministry of Fisheries has developed multiple group programmes that look at income-generation, provide alternative sources and are sustainable to the environment.

One such programme is the deployment of Fishing Aggregating Device (FAD). For those that do not know this, these are manmade aggregating fish structures that are deployed outside the reef system.

These aggregating devices allow for high value species such as *tuna*, *mahimahi*, *wahoo* and other *tuna*-like species to be accessible for coastal fishers for their basic livelihood and provide economic returns.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the idea of sustainability in this context is that when fishers fish within these aggregating device, they reduce fishing efforts on the reef system allowing resources to regenerate and reach sustainable levels.

Other programs include the development of:

- Seaweed and its value chain;
- Clam reseeded;
- Coral replanting;
- The protection of turtles and its rehabilitation;
- The establishment of marine protected areas; and
- Conducting awareness drives that focus on targeted species.

In highlighting these programmes, Honourable Speaker, Sir, one thing is certain and that is, we need support.

As an evident of this quest, last week the Marriot Group of Companies, in support of Fisheries, launched the “Rivers, Mangroves and Reef Foundation”. This initiative will see the Marriot Group of Companies raise ocean awareness by integrating coral rehabilitation, turtle protection and clam reseeded with all the establishments in Fiji. There are also plans to raise funds during this programme to assist communities in habitat rehabilitation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in our future plans, we are determined to keep collaborating, with civil society, private sector, line government agency and our bilateral partners to achieve our goals.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, on the issue of climate change, Fisheries is one of the main sectors that will be affected. This calls for a more proactive approach on our part to understand how increase in sea surface temperatures affect species distribution and how sea level rise affects marine eco-systems. As a matter of fact, more scientific knowledge is needed to allow us to be ahead of these alarming threats.

In the coming months, the Ministry of Fisheries is determined to strengthen our partnership with UNESCO under the OIC WESTPAC Programme that provides countries with scientific research and support. Also, under this Programme, we are looking to engage young leaders and marine biologists into study programmes that are designed at bridging the current scientific gap within Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, you may have noticed that our focus for this programme is targeted at young leaders. The idea is that youths are our future: “Our young can change the social norms. They can change what is unacceptable to what is acceptable.”

We need to listen and understand their priorities as they will be responsible for Fiji's growth in the coming years. If preparing for their future means additional seasonal bans on threatened species, then so be it. If it means amending the current legislation to protect them from loss of ocean resources, then let us push to support that. If

we are to ensure that our ocean resources are protected for the sake of our future which is deeply rooted to our culture and traditions, then we need to act now.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I wish to thank all our partners that have contributed to support us in our work. These include our foreign missions, civil societies, private sector and our fishing communities. Honourable Speaker, Sir, with your kind indulgence, I would like to end with the famous words uttered by the late Robert Kennedy, and I quote: "Some people see things as they are and why. I dream about things that are not and ask why not".

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we all have a part to play. I am determined to lead the Ministry of Fisheries into achieving greater things through sustainable initiatives. We can only achieve this through the support of all Fijians in this august House, including the Honourable Members from the Opposition. I call on the support of all Fijians regardless of where we are or where we live for the betterment of our future. *Vinaka vakalevu* and I sincerely thank you for your indulgence.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- The Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members, guests at the gallery, family members and supporters at home and abroad: I humbly rise to respond to the gracious speech of His Excellency the President of Fiji during his opening address.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all I cannot ignore to praise my Holy God for his divine power and guidance that enables me to stand before this august House to deliberate on issues of national interest, some of which were highlighted in the content of the speech.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while reading over and over again the content of His Excellency's speech, I respect the motive, attitude and the way the message was formulated by the writer, in that His Excellency the President is innocent regarding the context of his speech, some of which are said to be misleading the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from my own perspective, I am certain that the content is graciously lacking, there is simply the lack of grace. Obviously, the whole picture of the speech pre-dominantly focused towards the government in an attempt to gain credibility and boast over some good things the government claimed is unprecedented.

On the Constitution, everyone is well aware of how the 2013 Constitution was promulgated and become the law of this land, without thorough consultation. For those few people declaring their support do not represent the majority of various communities. Who can believe the fact that a six-year old understands the Constitution? The Constitution itself is dictating and currently we are witnessing the outcome. No one is above the law except the members of the FijiFirst Party, is it true? I leave it to you to answer the question.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- This Constitution failed miserably to honour the principle of humanity, despite the nation ratifying the treaties.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, may I speak very briefly about humanity. Humanity refers to the understanding and kindness towards human beings irrespective of colour, status and ethnicity. The most important values of all. This quality transcends to egocentric religions, social and cultural attitude. Humanitarian's work of one and all that is:

- More than machinery we need humanity;
- More than cleverness we need kindness; and
- More than intelligence quotient, we need emotional quotient.

A person in the mode of goodness feels more pleasure in helping others in need than a life of personal sense gratification, only service to humanity has taken away many forms in today's society. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the evil way our nation is being governed, tyranny type and personal sense gratification. A leadership that neglects the ethnicity, the right and the freedom of the people in respect of whatever ethnic we belong to is purely violating the principle of human right.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our nation had ratified nine core International Human Right Treaties. However, the Government failed totally to comply and honour this covenant, specifically the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, that is:

- Rights to ownership;
- Freedom of thought;
- Freedom of expression;
- Right of public assembly;
- Right of self-determination; and
- Worker's right and et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the rights that the Government violated through their tyranny concept of leadership. These are the wicked ways and this is unacceptable in our multiracial country. I respectfully urge the Prime Minister who possesses the sovereign power of all these to deliver correct, wise and acceptable decision. It is shameful and disgrace to entertain this sinful action. The Prime Minister should not and must not be moved and influenced by the advice by someone who has that ill and evil feeling that would bring an unstable environment into our nation.

Compared to the stone aged civilisation, today we have made progress extending help behind their families and social group. More awareness is still needed to change the heart of many who still have not come out of their self-centered life style. This change is possible through political, social and religious leaders of today only if leaders respect the concept and principle of humanity and the values of human life.

The school policy, the administrators and teachers play an important role in instilling human values in the hearts and the mind of young ones. Today humanity has been renamed as human rights and child rights in teaching professions.

There are five aspects of child development. In education psychology this is called human development. There are intellectual, emotional, social, physical, moral and spiritual development. If one aspect of the development is lacking, the child lacks holistic development. A well groomed child will be a healthy member of the human society. This is what the Government failed in terms of education in including certain curriculum in schools to develop our children to a well groomed child, thus would reduce criminal activities and crime rate would decrease.

Obviously, through the guidance and the divine power of the Holy God who would subsequently transform the evil mind and transform the attitude of moving away from wicked activities. I quote here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the true values of human life which are:

- Justice and loyalty;
- Love and forgiveness;
- Care and compassion;
- Confidence and courage;
- Respect and humbleness;
- Gratitude and generosity;
- Friendship and sympathy; and
- Honesty and accountability.

These are the values and principles of one who is in a leadership role in order to build a wealthy environment that will provide our nation's stability. All leaders must have these characteristic components in order to steer our nation to a wealthy and prosperous destination.

Economy, to my perception the national economy is deteriorating. The implications reflected on the budget in the last 12 years. So many development promises all over the nation has not been fulfilled. Upholding of civil servant salary increment and the recent reduction of schools allocation are some of the indicators of the status of the nation's economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, citizens of Fiji have been served with a wide range of service during the last 36 years by previous governments which was very much better off taking into consideration the humanitarian grounds surrounding various types of public services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the civil servants are the worst victims as a result of unfair decisions and policy makers by the leaders and those who are advising him accordingly. Civil servants are the ones who suffer most because of additional burden and unreasonable conditions in return of their hard work. They cannot speak up because there is fear of being victimised. The cost of living is too high, that needs to be adjusted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the condition of public roads around our towns and cities are in a very pathetic state. In Labasa Town, urban and around rural areas as well as all over Fiji, the condition of roads are worse, various portions of road have been under repair and neglected for several months. The continuous complaint by the community, vehicle drivers and vehicle owners end up in vain. Inclusively the oversight in all ministries is a clear indication of the status of the nation's economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on environment. While the Opposition joins His Excellency the President to commend the Government for the Climate Change legislation which is in line with the Paris Agreement and COP 23 requirement, we are appalled at how the gross exploitation of our environment and natural resources is allowed to go unchecked.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think no one can quarrel with the fact that the absence of an elected local government in our towns and cities has not only reduced them to ghost like look minus the greenery and growth of the past but also resulted in unprecedented littering. In many instances, rubbish bins are being doled out during election campaigns in our urban areas and are totally insecure and often overturned by hungry wild dogs roaming our streets as garbage is left uncollected for more than one day. This has turned many road sides in our communities into open garbage dumps, endangering public health and harming our environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while it is a good idea to have the Environment Management Act and Climate Change legislation in place, there is a bad need to implement and enforce them by way of compliance. I say this because of a number of reasons which are:

1. The need to synergise an enforcement and implementation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and Environment Management Act simultaneously in our work places. We have got no moral authority to endanger our work places by compromising the health and safety of our workers and the environment in which they work.
2. The need for public health officials to pool resources and work in partnership with other statutory authorities to curb and control the release of liquid waste (both toxic and non-toxic) into our drains and water system. This is harmful to our marine life compromising food security and public health.
3. Stray animals is another eye sore and a matter of grave public concern in both our towns and cities for littering and endangering public health in rural areas for damaging crops and harming livestock. I wonder what strategies are in place by the health authorities and the Ministry of Agriculture to mitigate this pressing matter and provide relief to our people.
4. We are a bit lucky for sometimes that we have had good rainfall and have somehow become immune to prolonged drought but the bushfire wrecking-havoc in Australia - a lesson for us to strategise and deal with this situation of environmental disaster and this is quite real given of cases of fire in Lautoka Rubbish Dump and in our cane farms. What strategies are in place and do we have funds to grapple with disaster of this kind?
5. The rate of fees, fines and levies imposed by the Ministry of Environment are exorbitant. This has in many ways deterred people and organisations to comply when it comes to paying fees and levies. Therefore, the submission of the Opposition on this matter is to reduce fees and levies and off-set the same by increasing fines and penalties for breach of pertinent legislations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, indigenous people are free and equal and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination based on their origin or identity. This had been affirmed by the Geneva Convention 2007 - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP).

Indigenous people maintain traditions that have been followed for generations. They have survived through invasion and colonisation while still maintaining their values. They have a distinct culture, social institution and religion. Indigenous people have specific rights because of their unique position as first people of the nation. This includes the right to speak and teach their native language and live on land of their ancestors and look after sacred sites.

Removing the indigenous identity, Fijian to a common identity is the worst discriminating mechanism ever experienced by the native of this land. I am proud to be born with such an identity because I am proud of my Creator. Are you not proud of your ethnic identity?

In the rural we are living multi- racially in harmony preserving the truth over our identity. People with respect addressing respective ethnic group with their respective ethnic identity; Fijian, Indian, Chinese, et cetera. We cannot hide the truth, the truth will prevail.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, using Fijian as a common identity is more less like daylight robbery because there was no consent from the owner, the indigenous. We branded this claim as an accidental of birth. Fijians are a nation and ethnic group native of Fiji who speaks Fijian and share a common history and culture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to convey my sincere gratitude to you, Sir, for my inclusion to be part of your delegation to the 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Uganda recently. I must admit this trip to me was indeed a valuable one. To inform the House, while exploring Uganda, it created excitement to learn the country has a federal system of Government, the Central Government and the Grand Council of the Kingdom of Buganda relatively and independently managing their respective administration, a similar system of government can be introduced in Fiji which will provide harmony and stability.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I reflect on the record of this Government, I am reminded of some historic quotes, the first of the late Honourable Vijaya Parmanandam who once used the following analogy and I quote: "A bird with a broken wing limping its way to avert danger lingering at its face." Yet another and I quote again from the late Honourable Vijaya Parmanandam: "A punctured time decorated with patches."

So much so, the Narcissus factor has overtaken their mentally so much full of praise for themselves that they have abandoned their former role in this melodrama of King Midas and chosen to play Narcissus now. I say congratulations for the double role but tragically at a perilous cost to the present and future of this nation.

In a nutshell the FijiFirst Government has failed Fiji. It has lost the moral authority to govern. It must either put up as pronounced in its manifesto or shut up and do the most honourable thing. They have wasted 13 years of our national life and we cannot afford to have this melodrama continue at a taxing cost to the nation and its future anymore. It is time to decide what we want and which direction we want to move into democracy or dictatorship.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, considering the scenario and the whole outlook of leadership and the status of the nation's economy, I call on the Government mandate and opt for the following, either:

- Resign and call for an election; and
- New Government to present a new budget and give Fiji a new sense of direction.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members I thank the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members that brings us to the end of the response for today and we will proceed with the next speakers tomorrow. Honourable Members the timings for the speech today was almost spot on. There were few contraventions of Standing Orders - 45(4) (c) and 66 (2). Those of you who are going to make your contribution in future days, please take note of those Standing Orders.

On that note, we adjourn till tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.00 p.m.