

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**THURSDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 2024**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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## **THURSDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 2024**

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER**

#### Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting, those joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet.

#### Year 6 Students & Teachers – St. Joseph the Worker Primary School

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the Year 6 Students and Teachers of St. Joseph the Worker Primary School. Welcome to your Parliament, children, and I hope that you will learn something from the workings of your Parliament.

(Acclamation)

#### Planned Water Cuts – Suva/Nausori Areas

On an OHS matter, honourable members, I have been advised that the planned water cut for the Nausori/Suva areas will commence from midnight tonight. The Parliamentary complex will also be affected, and whilst there will be a standby water truck here in Parliament, this will not be enough to ensure full hygiene standards for the Parliamentary complex. I have perused tomorrow's Order Paper and I can gather that the only urgent business is the Bill from the honourable Prime Minister. That is the only urgent matter that is at hand from the honourable Prime Minister.

If honourable Members are in agreement to stand down tomorrow's proceedings, but bring forward the honourable Prime Minister's Bill today, that would be very good. Are there any objections, honourable members?

I can see that some are still chatting there. Are we in agreement there, honourable Leader of

the Opposition?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.– It is alright, Sir, thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.– Finally, honourable Members, please, kindly take that Items 4 and 5 on today's Order Paper will be deferred to a later special sitting of Parliament which would be communicated in due course.

Thank you, honourable Members, and we will now proceed to Item 6 on the Order Paper. There is so many rumblings going on, I really do not understand. Are we together in all this and the way we are moving? Honourable Maharaj, you and honourable Bala seem to be engaged in a conversation.

HON. P.K. BALA.– All good, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.– Thank you.

### **PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

#### Review Report - Ministry of Waterways 2017-2018 Annual Report

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I hereby present the Committee's Review Report on the Ministry of Waterways 2017-2018 Annual Report. The Committee has undertaken its scrutiny of the Ministry's Annual Report for the period under review and noted the Ministry's achievements.

The reporting period was transformative and a challenging one for the Ministry. The existence of outdated or backdated reports reflects the challenges posed by staff turnover and the need for accurate record-keeping.

The Committee noted the lack of direction for the Ministry in its engagement with the Divisions in terms of its programmes and projects. The Ministry of Waterways encountered several significant challenges that impacted its operations and programme deliveries. Addressing these challenges required sound executive directives, innovative solutions, robust planning and collaborative efforts.

In addition to the above, the Committee noted that there was a lack of collaboration with other Government Ministries and other relevant partners. Working in isolation affected their programme delivery.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee noted the Ministry's inability to utilise the budgeted funds which considerably affected the work carried out during the year 2017-2018.

The Committee noted a significant number of unfilled positions within the Ministry and identified inconsistencies in the reporting of staff numbers.

I wish to extend my appreciation to the executives and staff of the Ministry of Waterways for their effort and dedication.

At this juncture, I take this opportunity to thank the honourable Members who were involved in the production of this bipartisan Report, namely, honourable T.R. Matasawalevu (Deputy Chairperson), honourable I. Tuiwailevu, honourable K.V. Ravu and honourable S. Nand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report -  
Accident Compensation Commission Fiji 2019-2021 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to submit to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report on the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji 2019, 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports.

The Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF) was established by the Fijian Government through the introduction of the Accident Compensation Act 2017, to pay no-fault compensation to Fijians who suffer personal injury or death as a result of an accident in Fiji as of 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2018. From 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2019, the ACCF has been providing compensation for injuries and deaths as a result of accidents arising in the course of employment as well as in school premises during working hours.

The Act provides for a scheme through which victims of accidents can be compensated without having to prove fault or negligence, subject to meeting the Act's requirements. Coverage of the no-fault scheme is broader than the previous law, as it extends beyond third parties.

The Committee noted that ACCF collaborates well with key organisations, like the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Employment, Land Transport Authority, Fiji Police Force and Legal Aid Commission, to deliver their services effectively.

Furthermore, the Committee noted that there are two sources of funding - the Motor Vehicle Accident Levy and 40 percent of the 1 percent Fiji National University (FNU) Levy. Both these levies are deposited in the Accident Compensation Fund Account and are used solely for the purpose of paying compensation under the Accident Compensation Act 2017.

The Board informed the Committee that the Act excludes the following:

- driving under the influence of liquor;
- failing or refusing to permit a breath test or a specimen of blood to be taken;
- not holding a valid driving license and failure to comply with all the conditions of the driving licence;
- any injury or death that did not directly arise from the accident;
- being convicted for any act or omission that directly caused accidents; and
- personal injury or death as a result of an accident arising out of/and in the course of

employment where the injured or deceased person is not a worker.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the Board members of ACCF and the entire team for making time to present before the Committee.

I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report:

- (1) Honourable S. Kiran - Deputy Chairperson;
- (2) Honourable P.D. Kumar;
- (3) Honourable T.N. Tunabuna;
- (4) Honourable A. Bia;
- (5) Honourable A.N. Tuicolo (Alternate Member).

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Consolidated Accident Compensation Commission Fiji 2019, 2020 and 2021 Review Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

#### Review Report - Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2021 Annual Report

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs submits to Parliament the Review Report on the Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2021 Annual Report.

The Sugar Cane Growers Fund (SCGF) is a lending institution established under the Sugar Cane Growers Fund Act 1984 (Act No. 9/1984), enacted by the Parliament of Fiji on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1984. Its core business is to provide loans to registered sugarcane growers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, SCGF also has a subsidiary company, namely South Pacific Fertilizers Limited which is primarily engaged in the sale and distribution of fertilizer and weedicides.

The SCGF aims to build sustainable value for stakeholders and for the sugarcane farmers and other industry players. The principal activity of the Fund as outlined under section 4 of the Sugar Cane Growers Fund Act 1984 is to:

- provide loans to sugarcane growers to increase the production of sugarcane;
- improve efficiency in the planting, growing and transportation of sugarcane; and
- rehabilitation of farms, farm buildings and other installations that were damaged, destroyed or affected by floods or other natural disasters.

The Committee was made aware of the various challenges that SCGF has been facing which include the need to review the Sugar Cane Growers Fund Act, the need to diversify sugar production to agriculture and non-agriculture, lack of subsidiary diversification, Government dependency and loan defaults.

The Committee noted that the Annual Reports presented by the SCGF lacked essential Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Sir, SCGF did not have any set targets during the period under review which could have enabled the Committee to make more informed recommendations.

The Committee noted some of the challenges faced by SCGF under the review period which are as follows:

- Uncertainty of lease renewal, ageing farmers, rising prices of fertilizers, damage to farm infrastructure due to flooding and rural to urban drift.
- The Russia-Ukraine war has had a significant impact on the availability and prices of raw materials, particularly fertilizers.
- At the same time, *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* caused devastating impacts to the farming community, especially in the Northern Division, causing massive structural damages to crops, dwellings and roads, Seaqaqa and Labasa districts being the worst impacted. Therefore, *TC Yasa* loan was developed to provide instant relief to affected cane farmers through priority and specialised loan assistance.

At this juncture, I would wish to extend our appreciation to all the stakeholders for their valuable input.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report - the Deputy Chairperson, honourable S. Kiran; honourable P.D. Kumar, honourable T.N. Tunabuna, and honourable A. Bia.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2021 Review Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby, move:

A motion, without notice, that the debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. C. J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I rise under Standing Order 80, to seek your permission to raise an issue of importance. I would like to apologise to the House for any language or untoward comments I may have used in this House, which I have offended any individual Member of this House.

MR. SPEAKER.- The honourable Member is standing under what Standing Order? You are rising on a Point of Order, Sir, but I need to...

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sir, it is on a personal explanation.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- It is a personal explanation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Standing Order 80 – Personal Explanation?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I apologise, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- No, we have not heard you yet. I will give you the clearance, then you will elaborate. You are standing on a Point of Order - Standing Order 80. I am giving you the leeway to do that.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to apologise to this august House for any language that I have made or used in this Parliament which may have offended individual Members of this House. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- It really gets on to my nerves, honourable Members. He is seeking a personal explanation on something he has stated which is not clear because he mumbles his words most of the time when he gets angry. The only thing I heard, honourable Members, was another explanation given by honourable Bala and referring to what he said. And that made him wrong for him to say, I can also say this. That is the only part that I heard, but it is great that you have taken it upon yourself, honourable Minister, on the personal explanation to give your apology here.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, likewise under Standing Order 80, I would like to apologise if I have hurt any individual using unparliamentary words. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I would like to implore on you honourable Members of this august House, let us always keep the decorum. You may notice that school children are here not only to watch us, but also hear us and see you, honourable Members, participate heavily in debates. As such, I only seek your indulgence, please, continue to uphold the dignity of the House. That is all I ask. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

Thank you very much, honourable Bala. Honourable Minister, you seem to take off on a very speedy pace when you are cool to when you blow up your position. Maybe, you have been counting your money a lot, that is why, anyway, thank you for that.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given a notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics;
- (2) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (3) Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management;
- (4) Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources; and
- (5) Minister for Justice.



Honourable Members, the Ministers may speak for up to 20 minutes and after the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of G-9 Bloc, or his designate, to also speak for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Honourable Members, the only thing I was trying to seek your indulgence on is, please, when it is five minutes, the light goes on and that is where it ends. Some go beyond for another one or two minutes. The Secretariat is trying to get you to understand that because when you go abroad and participate in international meetings, it is this similar kind of House rules that we adhere to. When you are given five minutes, it is five minutes. Try and teach yourself on how best you can speak by sticking to the time. If it is three minutes, it is three minutes, if it is 10 minutes, then it is 10 minutes.

Yesterday, I was asked by some of the honourable Government Members that the 10 minutes is too long, we should cut it down to five minutes. But I said, “No, we have heard a lot from the honourable Members on the Opposition side and the Government side, that the time to speak is being clipped off all the time. Every now and again, it is 10 minutes, now it is five.” You would like to speak for long, but if you start repeating yourself, then that long speech becomes just a sounding board. That is all.

I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics to deliver his Statement.

#### National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.— Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2023-2024 National Budget, the Coalition Government announced the formulation of a new National Development Plan (NDP). The preparatory works on the NDP began in November 2023 with consultations amongst respective Ministries and Government agencies.

On 16th January, 2024, Cabinet approved the Framework and approach for the formulation of the new NDP. Following a very consultative and inclusive process, the National Development Plan 2025–2029 and Vision 2050 was prepared and launched on 17th September, 2024 by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050 is an outcome of an inclusive and participatory approach. It was developed through inputs and feedback received from meetings of 11 thematic working groups based on key themes in relation to the economy and our people, a nationwide public consultation, consultation with civil society organisations, political parties and faith-based organisations, as well as written submissions received from the general public. Recommendations from the 2023 National Economic Summit, Fiscal Review Committee Report and the National Education Summit also provided valuable inputs into the formulation of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NDP was prepared under the overall guidance of the Strategic Planning Office of the Ministry of Finance, and I take this opportunity to thank each and every one for their contributions to this major national document.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050 is founded on the vision of “Empowering the People of Fiji through Unity”. The honourable Prime Minister has talked about this since we came into Government. To lay the groundwork for achieving the vision, the NDP contains policies and strategies across three pillars - Economic Resilience, People Empowerment and Good Governance.

The goal of the NDP is to bring greater prosperity to the nation, reduce poverty and improve the social and economic wellbeing of our people. Our people will be at the centre of development and the NDP, therefore, is a plan for the people. The NDP is also aligned with our global and regional commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NDP puts in focus a new plan that has been translated into goals, policies and strategies with a clear set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each identified sector. The five-year plan and the long term 25-year vision sits on the three broad pillars. The overall focus of the new plan is on –

- building microeconomic confidence;
- sustainable management of natural resources;
- categorising economic growth and diversifying the economy;
- uplifting the socio-economic wellbeing of our people, including our indigenous people;
- developing public infrastructure;
- protection of the environment; and
- a commitment to good governance and institutional reforms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NDP also presents Fiji's vision 2050 which offers an opportunity to charge our own destiny, to determine what we want as a nation, how we see ourselves and where we want to be in 25 years - a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable nation. The vision outlines the long-term development goals based on the aspirations of the people and will guide the short and medium term plans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji and our people aspire to be a high-income country by 2050, bringing a better quality of life for all. Achieving this vision will require ambitious reforms and tackling longstanding issues that have held us back from economic and social progress. A business-as-usual approach will not achieve this vision. Some of the key issues the NDP identifies that we need to address include labour productivity, infrastructure deficit in transportation and health sectors, female and youth labour force participation rate, investor and business confidence, ongoing skills mismatch and political stability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we call for commitment to prudent and effective planning in the implementation of the NDP in achieving the KPIs identified in the plan. There is a need to ensure that this Plan is based on availability of resources (aligning resources with revenue forecasts to maintain financial stability) and guarding against the pitfall of over-ambitious projections and underfunded priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is focusing on developing a detailed implementation plan with clear resource allocations. We urge all for effective coordination and collaboration between Government and development partners to maximise resource allocation and utilisation. We believe that the silo approach towards service delivery has persisted and limited the intended purpose of the programme approach to planning and implementation in the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the process of implementation is anchored on a result-oriented, transparent and accountable Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation (IME) mechanism. Monitoring will involve regular gathering of data to assess progress towards the desired outputs and outcomes, reporting of the progress based on set timelines, and timely intervention to undertake corrective measures, where necessary. Therefore, Sir, Chapter 9 of the NDP lays out the IME Framework and processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, State capacity and coordination are also crucial in ensuring an effective implementation and achieving the outcomes of the NDP. The Government is committed to building and expanding capacity in the Civil Service towards policy planning and execution for the effective implementation and achieving of NDP outcomes. The annual National Budgets, Sir, will be based on the development priorities set out in the NDP and will provide the financial resources to support the implementation.

I am happy to note that a number of strategies outlined in the NDP have already been factored in the 2024-2025 National Budget. For example, an allocation of \$5.75million has been provided for in the 2024-2025 budget for Groundwater Assistance Programme, which will increase access to safe and affordable drinking water in large and smaller islands. I am very pleased to inform Parliament that the Taskforce, led by the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, is working very diligently because we want to ensure that we are able to deliver, as much as possible, for our rural people and those in the maritime islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government greatly appreciates inputs received from members of the public who attended the public consultations held around the country. They did it freely without fear and provided excellent inputs, not only on the short-term basic things, but also in the medium and long-term on what the country ought to do. Technical support from the World Bank is greatly and rightfully acknowledged with special recognition to the team that is based here in Fiji and covering Fiji. Special thanks are extended to Permanent Secretaries and senior leadership of the Fiji Government Civil Service for the partnership and guidance in preparing the NDP. I want to, Sir, once again reiterate and thank all the Permanent Secretaries. I think they played a significant, important and critical role in the formulation of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have now commenced on a transformative national journey. In this journey, the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050 is going to be a guiding light. We are on the shared journey together. We will remain united and progress together to rebuild this country and realise its potential for all our people.

I want to take this opportunity, on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister, to thank all the honourable Members of this Parliament for their contribution; my colleagues on this side, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers, towards the formulation of the Plan and I also want to thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition and all the Opposition Members who attended the launch of the NDP last month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to emphasise this because the attendance from both sides of the House at such an important national event actually sent a very, very strong signal on the bipartisanship that we are building in this House. I can tell you, Sir, that with confidence, it has contributed to building confidence amongst our people, the private sector and the development partners, in particular. It helps bring the nation together, which is critical to our development and prosperity, which is exactly what the vision of the Plan, “Empowering the People of Fiji through Unity” says.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have clearly seen the impact of the bipartisanship and the overwhelming support, including that from the Opposition, towards our recent 2024-2025 Budget on the economy, and we are very pleased with that support. With the strong support for the Budget and the major policy measures, including the pay rise for civil servants, increase in the national minimum wage, Government capital projects and the slightly higher fiscal deficit, had boosted confidence and helped raise economic activity. It has clearly reversed the economic slowdown that we had noted in the months just prior to the Budget, which actually led us to revise the growth forecast from 3 percent to 2.8 percent in the Budget.

However, since then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of Fiji have been closely monitoring the economic developments, and we have noted with a lot of satisfaction some significant positive developments thereafter. All major indicators for aggregate demand, including private sector lending, VAT collections (adjusted for the impact of the rate changes) which is a key indicator for domestic spending), 20 percent increase in Government expenditure in the last seven months, pick up in import of investment goods, higher electricity consumption, increased vehicle sales, and improvement in income indicators like PAYE collections and remittances, have all seen a significant pickup.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the same time, our tourism industry, as has already been outlined by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, has continued to do even better than our earlier expectations, and over and above the record levels of last year. While we were forecasting initially a growth of around 3 percent in visitor arrivals for this year, the arrivals to-date shows that visitor arrivals have actually grown by close to 7 percent in the first eight months. We have, in fact, seen record arrivals month after month, and we are now anticipating that visitor arrivals will be just either below one million, or it could go above a million for 2024, and that will be another year of record tourist arrivals.

We have also seen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a turnaround in all major sectors and a pickup in investments which is expected to improve further. In here, Sir, I want to acknowledge the leadership of the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications for the reforms and the advocacy that have gone in, in terms of building confidence and attracting investors in all the sectors of the economy.

The low interest rate environment has helped investments and compared to Australia and New Zealand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the low interest rate environment has actually helped us in our investments, and we are continuously working across Government agencies to improve service delivery and ease of doing business. There are still some bottlenecks, but as a government, we are very clearly working on unravelling some of those obstacles.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, our resource sectors are still not doing as well as we would want them to and are definitely below their potential. But that is also another area that is clearly enunciated in our NDP, and the Government is working on them. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on all these preliminary data and trends, we are clearly looking at an upgrade to the 2024 growth forecast to around 3.5 percent or even higher now. However, the Macroeconomic Committee is currently reviewing these projections, and an official and independent forecast will be released next month.

However, as a nation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and as we envisage in the NDP to become a high-income country by 2050, the economy needs to grow at a consistent rate of 4 percent to 5 percent every year. Therefore, for everyone, including Government, the private sector, development partners, landowners, farmers, entrepreneurs, students, teachers, professionals, religious bodies, civil society organisations, and in fact, every family and every individual including the honourable Leader of the Opposition, who has given very strong support to the NDP, has to help us raise our growth and help realise the vision of our NDP. Only together, Sir, as the honourable Prime Minister has always said, since coming into Government, we can realise our collective vision and aspirations.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to brief this august House on the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050. The NDP is available through the Ministry's website and *Facebook* platform, and I urge everyone to take time to read through this very important national document and contribute towards its implementation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I adjourn the House for tea, I would like to

acknowledge once more another group of students who have come in during this time and they are from the same school as before -St. Joseph the Worker, from Nasinu. I also acknowledge the presence of the Administrator from Nasinu Town Council, Mr. Felix Magnus, sitting there with Mr. Orisi Navuso, and ladies and gentlemen who may be parents of these students.

(Acclamation)

If I may just say a few words in the vernacular:

*Kivei kemuni ra gone, vinaka vakalevu na lako mai nikua. Oqo na nomuni Vale ni Bose llawa. Keimami tu 'qo na nomuni Mata. Oqo na vanua e buli kina na lawa kei Viti, e bokoci talega kina na lawa, e veisautaki talega kina na lawa. Ni da tiko ena vakarurugi ni Matanitu, me da vakamura tiko na lawa. Esa ka levu na vakavinavinaka. Au raica eso e lave liga tiko. Ni via laurai tiko e na ka e lako tiko 'qo? Sa so na gone vakarerevaki tale o kemuni.*

*Ia, eda na vakarau vakacagicagi 'qo. O ni sa sureti tiko mo ni la'ki vakayagataka talega e dua na bilo ti vata kei na Turaga na Prime Minister kei na i Liuliu ni To ni Veisaqa, e rau tiko 'qo kei ira na Minisita. E sega ni kainaki sara mo ni vakaotia na ti, oya na neimami dokai kemuni ga na i solisoli ena nomuni yaco rawa mai ena siga nikua. Vinaka vakalevu.*

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for tea, and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.40 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.22 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to make their response.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics for his Ministerial Statement. I was listening to him very carefully on what he was trying to tell us. He was trying to sell the National Development Plan (NDP) in a very convincing way that the economy is doing so well, everything is all rosy, but the question here is, whether that is felt by the people on the ground?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- How do they feel? That is the main question. How do they feel when they go to the supermarkets to buy their groceries? How do they feel when they go to the pharmacy to get their medicine? How do they feel when they go to different service providers - whether they are engaging a lawyer or engaging a doctor? How much fees are they paying? They also feel it when they pay their electricity bill, their water bill, et cetera. Sir, on one hand we can talk about the economy doing so well, but is it felt by the people? How is it trickling down to the people? Everything matters when the people feel the economic growth.

Regarding the Plan, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a utopia that promises development but does not do anything to address the current challenges which I have just mentioned. None! There is a section that talks about, as a challenge, just a small couple of lines, 'challenges cost of living', and that is it. We expected that the current issues faced by our people will be addressed, but people are wanting that solution now. In fact, during consultation, people ask, when are you going to reduce the cost of living? When are you going to reduce the cost of food? Plan is not going to provide that solution right now, plan is long-term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen, not just the high cost of living, there is lack of jobs for graduates, exodus of skills and professional workers, lack of capital projects, deplorable state of health services, terrible road condition, water not in the tap, so tomorrow we would not be having our Parliament, rising drug issues, substance abuse, high rate of sexual violence and robberies, so where is safety? Where is safety?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has called the Plan 'the people's plan.' Really? People spoke during that consultation, they pleaded, "increase the wages so that we can survive in this difficult situation". He increases the wages by 50 cents, what does 50 cents do? Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is just a small fraction, it does nothing for the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another issue with this Plan is that it is not a reader or user-friendly. It appears that this Plan was written by a novice as an academic exercise. There is a complete mismatch between policies, programmes, and strategies with the KPIs, and we can see that this Plan is going to lead our country into disaster.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the Government stick to its plan? That is the main question. Can the Government stick to its plan, its values and principles, when they cannot uphold the rule of law - good governance, transparency and accountability - the key principles which underline and is the bedrock of this particular Plan? If that is not upheld, there is no way we are going to make any

progress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics also stated that the vision is to make this country a high-income country. We have delivered. The Bainimarama-led Government has delivered. From low income, we moved to a middle-income country, Sir, in less than 16 years. He wants more than 25 years to take us to high income.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has to up his game, he cannot be relying on the so-called 'National Development Plan', which I have said is not even reader or user-friendly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I should share this story with you. When I was doing my Masters, when I wrote my thesis, my professor said to me, "If you want people to pick up your document and read your thesis, make sure it is not black in colour, make sure it is colourful, it is exciting, people can look at the cover and will go for that document". Look at this cover, what kind of document is this, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

MR. SPEAKER.- Your time is up, Madam.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the G-9 Bloc, or his designate.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, I rise today as an independent Member of Parliament, not bound by any party obligation, but committed to the service to our citizens, to provide a response to the Statement by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics on the recently published National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Coalition Government for proposing such an ambitious Plan, one that aims to address growth and development across multiple sectors over the next several years. The fact that a detailed roadmap has been laid out for the future will, undoubtedly, bring about some level of confidence and reassurance both, domestically and on an international stage.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a plan is only as good as its execution. While the presentation of such an extensive development plan is commendable, the success lies heavily in its implementation. It is on this point that I wish to focus my response as an independent Member of Parliament. We have a unique position, providing unbiased and constructive criticism, a role we embody for the progress of our beloved nation. My main concern lies with the practical enactment of this Plan. We must consider practical challenges that potentially stand as hurdles in the path of progress.

It is crucial that we ensure that no Division or Province is left behind. Our country is beautifully diverse in our culture, our tradition and our religion. This diversity must be reflected in our national development strategies. As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, with this Plan, we must ensure that every initiative is as inclusive as possible, providing for the needs of every citizen. Tangible benefits, as alluded to, must be realised on the ground.

Furthermore, let us not forget that formulating a plan and executing it are two different tasks. A balance needs to be struck between an ambition and its feasibility. It is prudent to be optimistic, but it is absolutely mandatory to be realistic. The current economic climate of our budgetary restriction calls for a need to measure each initiative and positive impact against its cost and prioritise accordingly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, accountability is central to the success of any plan. It is good to note that Chapter 9 of the National Development Plan is dedicated to a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework that will allow progress and initiatives to be accurately measured and assessed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we stand on the threshold of an exciting and transformative era, let us remember that the road to development is not a race, but a journey. It is not about who we surpass, but who we uplift and bring with us. As we advance towards a prosperous 2050, let us leave no one behind. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor to respond to the Statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, let me acknowledge the presence of the Special Advisor to the Australian High Commission who is sitting here, Ms. Bale. Welcome, Madam.

We will move on. I now call on the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

#### Trilateral Meeting with Australian and New Zealand Trade Ministers

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Na Turaga Bale Na Tui Cakau*, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; before I begin my Ministerial Statement, I thought it would be appropriate to pay tribute to a great son of the Province of Ra. We probably would say he was a Lion of the Province of Ra – Mr. Tomu Vuetilovoni. He was called to rest a few days ago, Sir.

As we know, Mr. Vuetilovoni was firstly a captain of industry in our country. He led the Colonial Bank for so many years profitably. He groomed and mentored so many of our young men and women, one of which is the honourable Assistant Minister for Finance here today. After the 2000 *coup*, he was asked to become a Minister of that Interim Government and was later a substantive Minister for Commerce, Business Development and Investment, before their untimely removal in 2006.

He was also a passionate rugby advocate, Sir. His shadow looms large when it comes to the formation of the Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) in all those formative years. He spent, I am sure, not only a lot of his resource but his own personal resources to support the FRU at that time. Sir, with those few words and on behalf of a grateful nation, I wish to pay tribute to Mr. Tom Vuetilovoni for his service to Fiji and may his soul rest in peace.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share some insights into the high-level visit to New Zealand which was held from 19th September, 2024 to 24th September, 2024, and to inform this august House of some of the positive outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visit served as a crucial platform for strengthening and continuing to form stronger trade economic ties with New Zealand and Australia. For the first time, Sir, and probably in the history of Fiji, the first Trilateral Trade Meeting was held in Rotorua between the



Government Trade Ministers - the honourable Todd McClay of New Zealand, Senator Don Ferrel of Australia and myself, to discuss our trade opportunities which I will delve into a bit further. Because the honourable Senator Ferrel was also the Minister for Tourism, I had the honour of meeting honourable Matt Doocey from New Zealand in a three-way discussion with Fiji on matters regarding tourism and I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation for providing some information for that meeting.

The Trilateral Trade Meeting was organised by the Government of New Zealand through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and we had four Government representatives accompanying me from Fiji. The meetings, Sir, included ministerial meetings and networking events in three locations, namely, Auckland, Rotorua and Christchurch.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also had the opportunity to have a very cordial and very fruitful meeting with the new Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand, honourable Winston Peters, where we discussed potential opportunities for Fiji and New Zealand and the need to explore more value addition in exports and, particularly, economic diversification of our natural resources. To start the trip, I did have a briefing from the Trade Commission in New Zealand and suffice to say, Sir, that we are doing some very things in New Zealand which is helping the current growth in trade between Fiji and New Zealand.

In terms of the Ministerial Meeting, Sir, of course, the meeting initially focussed on PACER Plus where both, New Zealand and Australia, heard Fiji's position. We did highlight, Sir, that whilst PACER Plus does present opportunities, it does have some potential threats as well. We are currently in discussion, trying to actually establish a further deep dive into these risks to further understand the benefits and the risks of PACER Plus to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also had a discussion on something that is being led by Fiji at the moment, which is a coalition against overcapacity and over-fishing. This is to build on the momentum of the discussions at the WTO's 13<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference, to further strengthen disciplines on harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity or overfishing (OCOF). The proposed coalition would simultaneously increase the capacity of the Pacific to be allowed a voice in terms of the preservation of its natural resources and hopefully in time to come, Sir, create an opportunity to, perhaps, create our own tuna industry in the Pacific.

Apart from that, Sir, we did talk about some of the ambitions of Fiji, namely the potential to pivot towards Southeast Asia, our ambitions to join APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) at some point, and all parties agreed, Mr. Speaker, that there are opportunities to collaborate further as Fiji embarks on its diversification progress in areas such as commercial agriculture, aquaculture, tourism and ICT.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the site visits, I will talk very briefly about the targeted site visits that we did, in summary, just to give this august House a feel for what we were trying to do on this opportunity in New Zealand. What we did, Sir, is we went and visited the University of Waikato's Aquaculture Research Facility in the University of Waikato. We also visited the New Zealand Research Centre for Forestry called Scion in Christchurch, and we also visited Lincoln University, just to look at their research expertise in terms of trying to improve our horticultural and agricultural sectors.

What I can say, Sir, is that there is great potential for collaboration in these areas with Fiji. The advancements that are being made in terms of breeding of seaweed, in terms of horticulture, trying to plant more varieties, for instance, of avocado to make it more resistant to cold weather, so those are the types of things that are happening in New Zealand. We all agreed from those three

meetings that there is quite a significant opportunity to work with these two countries and I will be referring some of the contacts to the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, as well as the Minister for Fisheries and Forestry very soon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also visited Zespri International Limited which is the largest marketer of kiwifruit, and they are a co-operative model. Their revenue, I think, is about NZ\$4 billion at the moment and climbing, and they are the most successful model for cooperatives in New Zealand with about 50 percent of ownership of Zespri being owned by the farmers. The reason why we went to visit Zespri was to actually look at how we can maybe replicate some of that in Fiji and I think of the kava industry, ginger industry, turmeric industry, *dalo*, cassava and, perhaps, over the next few months, we will be exploring some of these opportunities in that regard.

We also visited a very interesting Māori village on our way down to Rotorua. We visited the Tuaropaki Trust in Mokai - an indigenous land organisation representing 297 families with a robust asset base of NZ\$1 billion. The visit focussed on looking at what they were doing and what was interesting in that Trust, Sir, was they focussed on their resources and from their natural resources, they leverage the ecosystem that now sits around the whole area.

They discovered that they could supply hydrogen power. They have a hydrogen power plant that is now selling electricity back to the grid in New Zealand. It is also powering up their own milk farm on the same area, it is powering up their vegetable greenhouses and it is just a wonderful way of, perhaps, demonstrating that there is hope with our indigenous. If we can leverage up the resources that they have, they can create other industry wherever they are located.

Also, Sir, we visited Rag Stag Timber, which is a largest timber company in the Southern Hemisphere. It is huge. Just to go and look at the technology, what they were doing, and the reason why I went there was to actually look at it in the context of what we are trying to do with mahogany and see what technologies are out there. That was part of the reason I also went to the Research Institute in New Zealand. Again, Sir, there are opportunities for further collaboration in that area. I hope in the not-too-distant future, we can unlock the mahogany opportunity. When we talked to those who know, they said it is a billion-dollar opportunity for Fiji, so I am hoping that very soon, we can unlock that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also in the final visit we visited some chocolate importers in Christchurch. It is called the She Chocolate. They are actually buying a lot of chocolate from the Pacific right now. They expressed an interest in trying to restart the cocoa industry in Fiji. There are some ongoing discussions by the honourable Minister for Agriculture with two particular Provinces in Fiji, with some input from the GCC as well. If that endeavour takes off, we can start rebuilding our cocoa industry. We are currently producing only about 100 tonnes of cocoa, if I am not wrong, and Samoa is now at 500 tonnes. They have gone through a rehabilitation exercise. The potential also is huge for that, and we are working very closely with the Ministry of Agriculture to try and ensure that, that opportunity grows legs as well.

Sir, as you can see from the visit, I hope I have demonstrated that the visit was not a junket just to go and have a holiday in New Zealand, but it was a serious attempt to try and continue this endeavour to diversify the Fijian economy, look at opportunities that are available, and then come back and work on that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to convey my deepest appreciation to the Government of New Zealand for coordinating this visit and making it a success. Particularly, I would like to thank her Excellency the High Commissioner of New Zealand, Charlotte Darlow, and the First Secretary, Finlay Fraser Milne, for coordinating the visit and making it a resounding success.

Moving forward, as I have mentioned, we will ensure that this visit is just not a visit *per se*, but that we can target some of the opportunities that we have seen and ensure that we continue to diversify the Fijian economy, so that our people, as mentioned by honourable Kumar, can see some benefits on the ground. I thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications on the high-level visit to New Zealand, and the first, as he says, the Trilateral Trade Meeting between the Ministers from Australia and New Zealand. I think one of the most important things for any country is to ensure that we have the right agreements in place with respect to trade so that there is facilitation that can happen for all our goods and services that need to go overseas.

One of the issues that he has raised was with respect to PACER Plus. I think because Fiji is a small island developing State similar to Papua New Guinea, we have difficulties with it, and that is why we were not signatories. All the other Least Developing Countries signed it, so we had to be looked at in a different manner and in a different tone.

One of the areas, and I have spoken to the honourable Minister about this, and he agrees with me also, is that we cannot have interference in our policy space when it comes to these agreements. So, it is a slow approach, not to say that it is not going to be done at all, but that kind of approach is needed because we all must remember and we all must think like this, that we are a developing economy. So, there are a lot of things that we need to be able to do ourselves as a sovereign country.

Mr. Speaker, part of the agreement also has a lot of positive issues in it regarding capacity-building which is really good for us. I think it is also important at this particular stage of our development because we have had a lot of mass migration of our skilled workers that are leaving, so that is something else that needs to be constantly discussed. Modernising our systems is also a part of it, our customs and processes, less red tape, et cetera, that needs to happen, our sanitary and phytosanitary measures, standards and regulations that help us with respect to market access. Also, supporting our regulatory reform that needs to happen, Mr. Speaker, which is also a glaring issue that needs to be looked at.

I know for a fact that the World Bank and International Finance Corporation have given us positive reports on this agreement but, at same time, we must not look at them and say that they are the gospel truth. It is us that need to deal with it and our sovereignty, Sir.

The Asian Development Bank has also supported it. What it truly does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of PACER Plus, if you look at it, Fiji and Papua New Guinea cover about 80 percent of the Pacific's economic output. So, the major players in this agreement is Fiji and Papua New Guinea, and until they sign, that agreement falls short in a lot of things. So, a lot of work still needs to be done. I have spoken to the honourable Minister about this, and he also agrees with me that we need to move forward and get this done.

Also, our private sector here needs to have a huge contribution on it and I know for a fact that he has been consulting with them. Some of them are still a bit wary about actually getting the signatures done with respect to getting PACER Plus off the ground.

Mr. Speaker, Sir from a perspective of what actually is good for us and what actually is bad for us, in terms of the disadvantages of PACER Plus, we did not sign because earlier on as I have said, it was very lopsided. To us it was lopsided, and it did not actually meet our development needs.

Everyone needs to understand, Sir, that this agreement is not a normal free trade agreement, it was a trade agreement which had development aspirations in it for countries like Fiji, Papua New Guinea, et cetera, and that needs to be at the forefront of the discussions when we had it.

We had difficulties right at the beginning with it, even with the Office of the Chief Trader Advisor, who was actually doing all these stuff for us. But in a nutshell, Sir, I think it is a good opportunity that the honourable Minister has taken up with respect to trying to see what can be done in terms of PACER Plus. We have a lot of potential in our country but at the same time, we must not lose sight and track of what we have and what we can do in other markets.

I am also very happy to hear that Fiji has led the negotiations regarding fisheries subsidies at the WTO. So, I know, and he knows also, and I am glad that it has been taken up as a Pacific issue and something is actually being done about it.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other things that we can talk about but due to shortage of time, Sir, I support the Minister's trip, and I think it has been worthwhile to get it done and it is something that needs to continually happen and we certainly should not put our foot off the gas on this particular agreement. Thank you very much, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.— I now call upon the Leader of G-9 Bloc, or their designate.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.— I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for his Ministerial Statement this morning and certainly, lend support to the sentiments expressed by honourable Koya in his response. In your Statement, Deputy Prime Minister, you mentioned that this problem of overfishing and overcapacity is important, given that we do share the same piece of ocean with Australia and New Zealand, and we are partners in that regard also on maritime security.

I just want to echo what was mentioned yesterday on this agreement under the Law of the Sea Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). I think Fiji was the first country to sign, and the need for Fiji to ratify. It needs to come to Parliament and to come to our committee so that we can go ahead with the ratification process.

I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and the Government for enhancing that relationship that we have with the two countries. They are big partners and big contributors to our tourism economy, as well as big assistance in terms of maritime security. I think they are not only partners, perhaps, they are *vuvale* (family), and it is the relationship that we want to enhance and I urge the Government to continue to build and enhance this wonderful - very fruitful relationship that we have with these two countries.

#### Fiji Mission to Indonesia Under the Australia and Indonesia Trilateral Agreement

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform Parliament about a critical trilateral initiative that is currently being developed between our Government and the Governments of Australia and Indonesia.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the presence this morning of the Counsellor for Infrastructure and Climate Resilience, Ms. Louise Scott, and Ms. Skye Bale, Counsellor in the Political Division of DFAT in the Australian High Commission.

This proposed partnership, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will be a major step towards advancing regional stability, fostering resilience and promoting shared development across the Pacific in line with our

common goals for sustainable growth, comprehensive disaster risk management and regional cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2021, the Governments of Indonesia and Australia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), aimed at enhancing trilateral cooperation with Pacific Island Countries, with Fiji chosen to be among the first to participate. The MOU prioritised cooperation in various thematic areas including disaster risk management, humanitarian response, climate change and sustainable economic growth. Given our shared vulnerability to natural disasters and the importance of regional collaboration, Fiji was selected to engage specifically in disaster risk management.

On 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2024, the Governments of Australia and Indonesia formally extended an invitation to our Government for a peer-to-peer exchange with Indonesia, designed to enhance collaboration in disaster risk management. This exchange, supported by Australia-Indonesia Partnership in Disaster Risk Management (SIAP SIAGA), was critical to our learning from Indonesia's extensive experience in disaster preparedness and response.

As such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, between 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2024, I led a 10-member delegation to Indonesia. This delegation included my Permanent Secretary, the four Divisional Commissioners and Officials from the National Disaster Management Office, as well as two members of the Australian High Commission, including Ms. Louise Scott, who is here with us and Ms. Elizabeth Beard. The mission had several key objectives to engage with Indonesia's national and provincial governments, to exchange best practices in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance, and to explore future areas of cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programme included engagements at regional, national, subnational and community levels. A key highlight was our visit to the ASEAN Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA), where discussions focused on the establishment and operation of regional humanitarian mechanisms, an area of significant relevance, given that we are considering establishing a similar mechanism in the Pacific.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I delivered a keynote address at the 2nd Global Forum for Sustainable Resilience and attended the Asian Disaster Management & Civil Protection Expo and Conference (ADEXCO). These platforms allowed us to share our insights and experiences, while also learning from global experts on building sustainable resilience.

I also had a bilateral meeting with Her Excellency Retno Marsudi, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, where Minister Marsudi outlined Indonesia's priorities for Pacific cooperation, focusing on climate change, disaster risk reduction and response, and the Blue Economy. I echoed Fiji's support for these efforts, particularly, in advancing peer-to-peer learning and exchange initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the delegation also engaged in productive discussions with Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB). During these discussions, we agreed to re-establish the bilateral MOU on disaster risk management, which had lapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a further show of Indonesia's commitment, BNPB extended an invitation for Fiji to attend the Indian Ocean Tsunami Commemoration in Aceh Province, taking place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> October this year. This engagement will further solidify our partnerships and enhance our disaster management capabilities.

At the subnational level, the delegation had valuable meetings with the Jakarta Provincial Agency for Disaster Management and the Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) Provincial Agency for Disaster Management. These engagements provided the delegation with an opportunity to observe

emergency operation centres at different scales and witness firsthand the coordination between national and subnational agencies during disaster events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visit to a local community in Bali, Indonesia, was equally insightful. The delegation observed how disaster resilience is embedded at the grassroots level, through community training and education programmes, supported by the Australian-funded SIAP SIAGA initiative. These local-level efforts align closely with Fiji's vision of building resilient communities that are equipped to manage disaster risks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, disaster risks in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in the face of climate change, are no longer confined to borders, as we all know. Complex riskscapes, as highlighted in the United Nations' 2019 and 2021 Asia-Pacific Disaster Reports, show how biological hazards, climate variability and disasters interact, posing increasing challenges for our region. The proposed trilateral partnership, combining Indonesia's wealth of experience and Australia's strong humanitarian commitment, will allow Fiji to build greater resilience to these risks.

Our Government has already benefited from the longstanding cooperation with Australia. Through the Fiji-Australia Vuvale Partnership, Australia has supported disaster preparedness activities in Fiji, such as the AUD1.2 million Disaster Resilience Programme and the Cyclone Recovery Programme, which rehabilitated critical infrastructure damaged during *TCYasa*. Additionally, regional initiatives, such as the Australian Humanitarian Partnership Disaster Ready 2.0 Programme, Pacific Insurance and Climate Adaptation Programme and the Women's Resilience to Disasters initiative, continue to bolster Fiji's disaster preparedness and recovery efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our cooperation with Indonesia is equally promising. The draft MOU for the Fiji-Indonesia cooperation, initiated in 2022, is now under review to reflect the new strategic objectives emerging from this trilateral initiative. This trilateral cooperation between Fiji, Indonesia and Australia is a forward-looking initiative. It provides a solid foundation for Fiji to strengthen its disaster risk management capabilities, while also contributing to the broader regional resilience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to convey my deepest appreciation to the Governments of Indonesia and Australia, for their continued support and collaboration. The lessons learned from our mission to Indonesia have been invaluable, and we are committed to working hard to implement these learnings for the benefit of the Fijian people.

As a government, we will continue refining and prioritising this trilateral initiative over the coming months, ensuring that it delivers meaningful and long-term benefits for our nation and the wider Pacific region. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU –Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. Of course, it is an important commitment from him and his team, and I wish to acknowledge him for that. Again, this proves the point that for us, SDG 17 is important - the partnership, because we do not have the capacity, we do not have the capability, and this is where regionalism and, of course extending beyond the region as well in terms of the regional architecture, where we have issues of common interest. This is what brings us together.

I just focus on two areas without repeating what the honourable Minister has stated and this is for Government, particularly from experience for us to raise our level of resilience and particularly in terms of preparedness, not only in its strategies but of course in its application. What is important

is political will. I will say that again, for us to raise our level of resilience and of course our level of preparedness so that we can deliver when it comes to emergency situations.

The political will and commitment is so important. Based on the past experience Fiji has gone through so many disasters, but disasters after disasters we have reports. Reports are filed away. These are not analysed, and the lessons learned from those reports taken. And of course, what is important, is the direction that we will take based on the leadership of Government.

In 2011, Mr Speaker Sir, we changed the way things were done at NDMO with just a simple statement. Shifting from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. That really changed the dynamics of how we dealt with emergencies and disasters. Because we prepare well now it will be easier for us when it comes to emergency situations and this why I was saying unfortunately in most previous disasters, good reports, but filed away, nothing was done to it. It needs political will and commitment which change the development paradigm with three simple factors; the way we live is changing what we call the new norm, intensity, the frequency, the way we live is changing.

Therefore, the way we do development must change. Not just development for the sake of development, but resilient development, that is very, very important. And the third one is the partnership, the way we live is changing therefore, the way we do development must change, therefore, the partnership becomes important as well. And that it means that for continuing with this, because only then we can prepare well for the next disasters. And commitment and application either they be an Australian government either that, New Zealand government we have the MOU that we signed with Indonesia few years back. It is time that these MOUs be revisited. But how are we going to apply what we have learnt from Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand back here in Fiji?

We went on taxpayers' money, what is important is that we must see the results back here. Honourable Minister, I have a word of advice, I know that a lot of your senior staff are leaving. I think now, NDMO has not been tested for quite a while with a serious disaster and probably with the assistance of the Australian Defence Force, let us bring coral reef exercise very quickly. We need to do some tabletop exercises because of the turnover that is happening in the Ministry. We look forward to the discussions on the Bill this afternoon, Sir, but I commend the Ministry, and this is an important subject, and we must all support this because we prepare well now it will save us a lot in the future. Thank you.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his Statement, and we acknowledge the information that he shared with us this morning and we have nothing further to add. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. So, I have already invited the honourable Minister for Lands to take the floor now. My apologies to that Group of 9.

#### Government Freehold Buy-Back Scheme

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, honourable Leaders of the Opposition, Members of Parliament, those who are watching at the gallery and those who are joining us live.

I rise this morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to speak on the statement of the Government's Buy-Back Scheme from 1989 to-date. The Government's Freehold Buy-Back Scheme was the initiative of the Rabuka SVT Government in 1989, and it was promised on buying back ancestral land that were alienated as freehold land through assisting *iTaukei* landowners who had little or no land available for agriculture registered under their names in the Register of Native Lands to meet the

growing members of the *mataqali* or the LOU or landowning unit.

The first freehold buy-back land was approved by Cabinet on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1989, and they included these parcels of freehold land: Vunia Island in Vanua Balavu; Tuvumaca, Welagi/Yavusa in Taveuni; Matakunea, Navatu in Cakaudrove; Korodogo, *Mataqali* Naduru, Dogotuki in Macuata and; Mua Estate, *Yavusa* Wainikeli/Naselesele in Taveuni.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the 20th April 1993, Cabinet further approved \$2million in the budget to assist in additional freehold buy-back initiatives to further formalise the purchase of 24 freehold parcels of land to assist the landless resource owners secure arable, cultivatable land interest-free.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of the 24 freehold buy-back land, 15 are in the Northern Division, 8 in the Central Division and one in the Western Division. The Ministry through its Land Use Division is responsible for the administration and monitoring of this Buy-Back Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Scheme the Government purchases freehold land for sale in the market on behalf of the *iTaukei* landowners. The acquisition process was based at the time and continues to be based on a fair and market price determined by Government registered valuers. This will be made possible through Interest-free loans as stipulated in the terms and conditions of the Sales and Purchase Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the main features of the Sales and Purchase Agreement between Government and the respective LOUs includes the purchase amount shall be paid over period of 30 years. Upon completion of the payment, the Director of Lands on behalf of Government shall transfer the said land to the Trustees in freehold status, and it shall not be alienated, sold, transferred or exchanged except to the State. If the Trustees default in payment of the monies as scheduled, then the Minister may rescind the agreement and require trustees to hand over the vacant possession of the land to the Director of Lands, and all monies paid shall be forfeited to the Government. Subject to Cabinet approval, the terms and conditions of the agreement may be varied by mutual consent of the parties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 29(5) of the 2013 Constitution, provides that all land that existed as freehold land immediately before the commencement of this Constitution shall remain as freehold land even if it is sold or purchased unless it is sold to the State or acquired by the State for a public purpose under Section 27. Given these new constitutional requirements, the buy-back land shall now revert and have reverted since 2013 to qualified landowning units in its current tenure as freehold land and not as *iTaukei* reserved land as per initial Sales and Purchases Agreement stated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so far out of the 24 freehold buy back lands, nine landowning units have fully paid their dues amounting to a return of \$1.7 million to the State. To date, seven landowning units have paid off their debts with parcels of land transferred are:

- the Yavusa Nasuva in Tuvumaca in Taveuni, Cakaudrove,
- Wairuku Estate, Waivunia Savusavu in Cakaudrove,
- Yavusa Waidau, Navuloa Bureta Ovalau in Lomaiviti,
- Mataqali Nailagobokola in Nausori, Tailevu,
- Mua Estate, Yavusa Wainikeli, Welagi Tavueni,
- Namaqumaqua, Mataqali Bitolevu in Serua; and
- As of last week, on Friday, Tuwaidra in Nabu, Yavusa Vugalei, Kasavu in Tailevu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, two landowning units have fully paid their land parcels in addition to the seven and their land parcels have yet to be transferred to them and they are:



- Matakunea, Mataqali Nasavanivonu, Navatu, Savusavu, Cakaudrove; and
- Dedena Mataqali Naumisi, Namena in Tailevu.

On the other hand, 15 landowning units have partly paid their dues with a total outstanding balance of just over 2 million, which is currently being monitored by the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a way forward, the current measures undertaken by the Ministry to improve loan repayments are:

- (1) Strengthening collaboration with our landowning units. The Ministry through the Land Use Division, continue to liaise with the Trustees and landowning units and properly to advise them and assist them wherever it is relevant.
- (2) Joint Venture Initiative – Land Use Division has successfully implemented joint ventures initiatives and resource owner friendly concepts to fast track and assist landowning units in paying back their loans.
- (3) Leasing of their land. – For unserviced accounts, ongoing consultations and active marketing and leasing land to assist the landowning units in their payments. The Ministry is currently leasing 11 freehold buy back lands to assist the landowning units that have defaulted in their payments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the successful applicants, the Ministry has also rendered assistance to landowning units such as redefinition of their boundaries for buy back lands that have been paid off, land-use visibility reports on potential developments and ongoing consultations and assistance rendered for the transfer titles without any cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the success rate sitting at 37.5 (percent) meaning 9 out of the 24 of the buyback land scheme fully paid, the buyback scheme has greatly benefited the traditional landowners. It has brought a sense of belonging, pride, ownership, security and of course empowerment to them. The Ministry, through its Land Use Division for the land bank have always emphasised the right or equal access to land for all including the vulnerable members of indigenous *i-Taukei* and those desiring to secure affordable parcels for their livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the journey that began three decades ago for the recipients of the buyback scheme is a journey that has been characterised by their determination, resilience and unwavering commitment to prosperity. The Government and the Ministry is, therefore, proud to be part of the journey by these landowning units. Over the years the Ministry has been steadfast in its commitment to provide fair, transparent, effective and non-discriminatory administration for all buy back land purchase under the Freehold Buy-Back Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, landowning units' land have been handed over are always advised to cultivate their land, maximise its potential for productive purposes and generate significant returns for the landowning units. Furthermore, LOU's are always encouraged to pursue income generating initiatives to benefit the current and future generations. Added to this, are the intrinsic in heritage attached to land which hovers around reclaiming their culture, their identity, and indeed their future.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I still have some time in my present role as the acting Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration, I wish to inform Parliament and the people of Fiji that our security personnel, men and women of the RFMF in the deployed units and regions of Lebanon, Syria and Golan Heights, Jerusalem and in Sinai are all well, safe and in high morale. Whilst they are there, they remain compliant with the safety protocols that are required of them in a very hostile region at

present. I also urge all our citizens to remember our men and women in this region in the Middle East in their prayers, whilst they go through a very turbulent and difficult time.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like thank the honourable Minister of Land for his Ministerial Statement. Mr. Speaker, the tribute must be paid to every government since the initiative of Buy-Back Scheme came into effect. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Buy-Back Scheme was established in 1989 as the Minister has alluded under the Rabuka regime with the intentions or objectives to assist the native landowners who had little or no cultivable agricultural land. Thirty years incentive was given to the *Mataqalis* to repay loan before regaining absolute ownership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, the Buy-Back Schemes must be monitored to see whether the land is utilised and used for that purpose or else it will be of no use. Until 2020, only four *Yavusa* were paid off fully and gained ownership. In 2021, the FijiFirst Government paid \$4.7 million on the land Buy-Back Scheme. It purchased 26 parcels of freehold land on behalf of land-owning units.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most or majority of Fijians in our country do not own land, hence initiatives should be given to those Fijians, and here the honourable Minister for iTaukei wants to transfer all state land to iTaukei land. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government of the day must monitor as most of the buyback land has breaches such as non-cultivation and land lying idle. And we all know, how important the agriculture sector is, as what happened during COVID 19. Keeping land idle is of no use for our nation or to our people.

In conclusion Mr. Speaker, Sir, it may be a good initiative, but every Fijian has to be looked after and should own a piece of land for living. In fact, most of iTaukei does not have any land in Fiji. As this initiative was started by the honourable Prime Minister, I would urge the honourable Prime Minister to start an initiative that will look after all Fijians, and all will have a piece of land in Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Kirpal. You are very true in saying that some iTaukei do not have any land, they are landless people. So, this is one way of providing land to them. The honourable Minister for Lands has quoted that specific Section of the Constitution 2013, which when buying back freehold land, it remains freehold land. But I think reservation of those freehold land can be undertaken, because we have a precedent case in Ovalau, where freehold land has been reserved for the landowners.

I now call on the leader of the G9-Bloc or their designate.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, let me thank the honourable Minister for Lands for the statement on the buyback scheme and for the update, the assurance that our men and women were serving over and beyond shores, are well and safe. Perhaps, I also take this time to remind the honourable Members of the Parliament that the best way to remember them, not only as we pray, but the best way to remember them is to support them with your poppy. So, if you are not wearing a poppy, I would ask them perhaps, but they should be fine and contribute to the aftercare fund of the servicemen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also stand as the Chairman of the trustees of the Bua Buyback Scheme for the *Yavusa Wainikeli* in Naselesele, Taveuni. Perhaps, my response to the honourable Minister is really in the form of our journey - in how we acquired the land, what we want to do with it and where we are at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 30 years ago, through the wise decision of our Chief, Ratu Talemo Ratakele, and the others of the *vanua*, we decided to commit the *vanua* to acquire this piece of land. It took us

30 years to pay it off, until last year when the title was given to us by the honourable Prime Minister. Those years of hard work, but of a commitment by the *vanua* to see an opportunity to get back the land that belonged to them but is owned by someone else, the opportunity to own it and the challenge to utilise it. This is where we are today. The challenge to utilise this piece of land which is ours, Yavusa Wainikeli.

I want to share with you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have done so far. I sit as a chair with some of us who live in Suva and representation from the *mataqali* in *vanua*. We have left out a strategic direction for the utilisation of this land here. It is a five to 10 and beyond, and how are we going to utilise this land. It has not been an easy exercise. The challenges within the *vanua* with the conflicts of who owns it and who should use it. This is something that we are facing right now, but really the way forward is advocacy and the ability of the committee or the team that is leading the *vanua* to be able to explain very clearly on what the land is meant for, and what it should be used for.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we saw the opportunity when we acquired this piece of land. It was an investment forward, an investment for the next generation, and above all, the realisation and the confidence that we now own the land, we must now use the land to benefit us now and the generation to come. We have been fortunate that through the consultation with the Government agencies, in this particular case, the honourable Minister for Land, and the honourable Minister for Agriculture who have guided us all along in their support. This 1,184 acres of land in Bua of four blocks, we will be signing an MOU soon with the honourable Minister for Agriculture to improve some of the roads and a demonstration farm. We have also completed a land assessment with the honourable Minister for Lands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the baseline that we should start off. I wish I had more time to tell our story, but at this point in time, we have realised that the key to our success in our venture forward and beyond is based on four key areas. The first one, is really on good leadership, that is given two good plans. Three, *duavata*, *veiwekani vinaka* and *cakacaka vata* brings *duavata* or unity. Four, a continuous consultation and support from the Government and the other key stakeholders. I once again thank the Government, and this is one of the most useful projects that Government has done that will benefit our people.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, honourable Naivalurua has taken a very huge, in fact, it is a giant step to help his own *vanua*, his *yavusa*. At one time, the chiefly family were closely shutting off people to use that particular land that was bought for the whole tribe. I am so glad and happy that honourable Naivalurua has decided to shift his base from Sawani back to his village. He has done very well, and I must applaud him for that.

Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for lunch and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.42 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, just before we proceed, please join me in welcoming the Year 6 students and teachers of Ratu Sauvoli Memorial School.

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Just allow me to say a few words in the vernacular. *Vinaka vakalevu na gade toka mai na mai veisiko toka na nomuni Bose Lawa. Ra gone au kila e yawa sara na vanua ni lakova mai. Ratu Sauvoli Memorial School mai Noco qo ka? Vinaka vakalevu, ni bula vinaka. Ni kalougata tiko ra gone.*

### Strategic Vision and Progress Towards Enhancing Access to Justice

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, *na gone Turaga na Tui Cakau*, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, *kemuni na gone mai Rewa, qasenivuli*, and members of this great country who are listening in at this moment, before I begin, Sir, allow me to respond to the issue raised by honourable Kirpal, and I will do so by referring to a speech made by His Excellency at the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June of last year. This what he said, and I quote:

“...in line with Fiji Government and Cabinet decision to cede to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNRIP)” and President Katonivere highlighted in this summit, “provides an opportunity to inform the interest of the community, that Fiji's has taken the important step of supporting UNRIP.”

He goes further to say, and I quote:

“...we join the international community in affirming the fullest expression of Indigenous people's aspirations. Fiji's support to UNDP is complementary to its commitment to ILO Convention 169 which ratified in 1998. As a nation we will continue to ensure that the Rights of Indigenous People are safeguards and protected.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one has to ask a very important question, how did the landowners first lose their land? A good example is none other than Suva City, as I understand there was a case in the Lautoka High Court, they lost out, High Court, Court of Appeal because of time, records. I do understand they were only paid annuity, a small amount and that is what the people of Suvavou are still begging for.

The Buy-Back Scheme is a Social Justice Programme for the *itaukei*. I was in Koro recently, there are freehold land on Koro Island. One has to ask how can there be freehold land on the island? I have a file of Mudu Village, Koro, who are asking for land, 500 acres they only have 200 acres and the numbers keep on growing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this government is committed to the principle of restoration. I did say this in my very first speech here. For my fellow Parliamentarians, I cannot explain how it touches our heart when we talk about land, land lost, dubious means, fraudulent means an outright illegal. Our forefathers did not have any means to reclaim that land, but this scheme is a Buy-Back, it gives a small satisfaction to the members of the *iTaukei* who have lost land and that does not stop the other ethnic groups from purchasing land through lease, outright freehold, or even if you want to rent. But for the owners of land, as honourable Naivalurua articulated, they have taken steps to be developed,

and this is the legacy of this very government - a government that cares and a government that delivers.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Hogwash!

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Listen!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Yesterday, I was in a funeral, head of my *mataqali* said, so, when are we going to get this thing back and he said, it takes time. What I am saying is, the government is not going to willy-nilly deal with the rights of the *itaukei*, it is going to follow the proper channel of law by due process and of course consultation. That is the point Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to stress in relation to honourable Sanjay Kirpal.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- No shortcut!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- No shortcut! James 4:10 and I quote, “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*” Honour, get down on your knees before the master, that is the only way out, you will get on your feet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will speak on the Ministry of Justice’s strategic vision and progress towards enhancing access to justice and public service delivery in Fiji. It is with great honour and responsibility that I address this august Parliament today. The Ministry of Justice remains steadfast in its mission to uphold justice, integrity and accountability, reflecting our unwavering commitment to rule of law.

Over the past months our accomplishments have been more than mere milestones. This signifies our relentless pursuit of excellence in the public service. Every initiative we undertake is grounded in our dedication to serving the people of Fiji and fostering a society where justice prevails. The ministry stands as a pillar of democracy and a beacon of hope in public governance guided by strategic visions that aligns the aspirations of our citizens within imperatives of justice.

We have made significant strides through carefully planned initiatives that you flag both the commitment to operational excellence and our ability to adapt to the evolving need of our society. Our ongoing reforms in process and systems coupled with the active engagement of our staff, ensure that we continue to meet the demands of the public and uphold the highest standards of services.

One of the most pivotal undertaking of the ministry has been the comprehensive socialisation of this 5 Years Strategic Development Plan for 2025-2029. This plan is not a mere document, it is a strategic framework that charters the course of our future endeavours, outlining our aspirations and how we intend to achieve them. Aligned with the National Development Plan for 2025-2029, the Ministry of Justice will continue to promote justice and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The SDP has been meticulously disseminated to all registry centres across Fiji, ensuring that every member of our staff is aligned with the Ministry’s new mission, vision and values. The socialisation process is a transformative journey that seeks to embed the principles of excellence, innovation, and accountability within the very fabric of our Ministry.

By engaging our 164 member staff nationwide in this process, including the six additional staff who joined on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2024, we ensure that our strategic objectives are not only understood but are embedded and actively pursued at every level. This alignment is critical as it empowers our

staff to contribute meaningfully to our overarching goals, thereby enhancing the quality of service we provide to the public. The Strategic Development Plan serves a compass that guides our actions and decisions, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and excellence.

As stipulated in the Ministry's Strategic Development Plan—Strategy 3: Customer Empowered Services – The Ministry engages its customers for long-term marketplace success. This engagement strategy includes how the Ministry listens to the voice of our customers, builds customer relationships, and uses customer information to improve and identify opportunities for innovation.

The Ministry profoundly values the importance of being a good listener to our customers. The diversity of views, either positive or adverse are considered as a vehicle of change and a direct contributor to business excellence either from customer services standpoint or capacity as an organisation to operate within the excellence mechanisms.

The Ministry uses the following customer mechanisms to listen to the voice of the customer:

- (1) email feedback;
- (2) feedback forms;
- (3) formal and informal correspondences;
- (4) telephone;
- (5) field reports; and
- (6) customer referral mechanisms.

These mechanisms have enabled the Ministry to innovate and creatively enhance our customer support, fostering loyalty and trust. By cultivating a customer-centric mindset within our workforce and deepening our understanding of customer behaviour, we have been able to improve the services we provide while promoting a culture of knowledge-sharing and continuous improvement.

The Ministry has shifted its focus to a customer-oriented approach, prioritising the development of strong customer relationships. This shift has empowered our workforce to a better segment and to understand our customer needs. Our commitment to this approach is evident in the outreach programmes, where we actively bring our services to the people, ensuring greater accessibility and engagement.

The Ministry has extended its services to the public through the registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages, as well as Registration of Companies, conducted by district staff. Many individuals in remote maritime islands have not been registered, leading to:

- (1) children attending school without birth certificates;
- (2) couples living together without being officially married;
- (3) lack of death certificates for those who have passed away; and
- (4) other services of the Ministry can facilitate.

In doing so, the Ministry has identified its customers through:

- (1) product offerings and customer support;
- (2) customer segmentation;
- (3) building customer relationships; and
- (4) complaint management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with our long-term strategic vision, the Ministry has developed an improvement planning process that transforms our priorities into actionable steps and measurable outcomes. This detailed blueprint guides daily operations, ensuring alignment with our goals by involving input from all levels of the organisation. The process promotes coherence and consistency, driving performance and fostering a results-oriented culture. Through this alignment, staff can focus on achieving clear objectives, enhancing efficiency, ownership, and accountability in their efforts to deliver excellence.

Reflecting on a comprehensive record of our achievements, challenges and learnings over the years, it provides a transparent and detailed account of our performance, highlighting key milestones and areas for improvement. This serves as both a testament to our progress and a foundation for future improvement. The progress of the Ministry is very critical for accountability ensuring that we remain transparent and answerable to the people we serve. We have begun our journey capturing the essence of our efforts and the impact of our initiatives. It provides valuable insights and informs our strategies and guides our future endeavours. By reflecting on the past, we can learn from our experience and build on our successes as we continue to improve and evolve as an organisation.

A pivotal aspect of our strategic and operational planning is the formulation of the costed Operational Plan. This plan aligns the financial requirements and allocations necessary to achieve our strategic objectives, ensures that our resources are utilised efficiently and effectively, maximising the impact of our initiatives.

The costed Operation Plan is an essential tool for physical responsibility and strategic resource management enabling us to deliver our commitments while maintaining financial stability. The formation of the costed Operation Plan was a vigorous process that involves detailed analysis and careful planning. To ensure that every dollar is spent wisely, supporting initiatives that drive our mission forward. This plan not only provides a financial road map but also serves as a tool for monitoring and evaluating our progress, ensuring that we remain on track to achieve our goals.

The Ministry of Justice is deeply committed to making justice accessible to all Fijians through our extensive outreach program. These initiatives are a crucial part of our mission, as we strive to bring essential services directly to communities across Fiji. Our outreach includes a range of services such as registry of births, deaths, marriages, register of titles, official receiver and register of companies. From August 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, conducted an outreach programme in Yasayasa Moala.

This programme provided the village of Totoya, Matuku and Moala with guidance support on obtaining vital documents. During this period, officials and staff from the births, deaths and marriage registry officiated four court marriages, three in Yaroi, Matuku and on a vessel travelling from Lomati to Yaroi due to the inability of officials being able to travel to Lomati to conduct the court marriage. The outreach efforts in Yasayasa Moala yielded impressive results. 7 late birth registrations, 27 business registrations, 14 new birth registrations and 42 birth certificate renewals.

Building on this success, the Ministry of Justice organised a ministerial tour to Koro Island from September 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The purpose of the tour was to bring our services closer to the people, strengthening their trust and confidence in the justice system. As part of this effort, in partnership with Post Fiji Ltd, we opened the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registry Office at the Post Office in Koro Island. Accompanied by representatives from eight Government Ministries and 13 stakeholders, I visited five villages namely, Nasau, Nabuna, Nakodu, Nacamaki and Navaga, along with key institutions including the Nasau Post office, Koro High School, the District Commissioners Office, the Nasau Agriculture Station and the Nasau Health Centre and various nursing stations. The tour was an astounding success with the people of Koro warmly welcoming the services provided.

In each village, residents eagerly learnt to access services from BDM Officers and FNPF Staff, who printed ID Cards and checked members account balances. Many villagers, especially women, seized the opportunity to register their business and apply for grants offered by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection. The engagement and enthusiasm from the community underscored the positive impact of bringing this vital service directly to the people of Fiji.

From 25<sup>th</sup> September to 29<sup>th</sup> September, I, along with senior members of the Justice Ministry visited Ovalau to engage with communities and provide direct assistance. Accompanied by a representative from the Registrar of Companies and the Ministry's executive team, we visited Tokou, Voma, Nauouo, Waitovu and market vendors along the Levuka corridor. The primary focus was to facilitate registrations of businesses, births, deaths and marriages services. This initiative sparked great interest with many residents registering small businesses including canteens, farms, food services and handicraft centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of 253 new businesses were successfully registered in Levuka, and as of today, 253 businesses have been approved. The Ministry is extending its outreach to other villages, including Bureta, Lovoni, Taviya, Arovudi and Rukuruku from this Friday into this weekend. Many residents were unaware of the need to register their businesses until they sought Government aid, where registration was required. To assist these new business owners, the team is providing guidance on online business registration and applying for the business grant from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce.

In the coming months, additional registry offices will be established in Qarani on Gau, Keiyasi Village in Nadroga/Navosa, Rotuma, Ba and Kadavu. This effort reflects our commitment to embodying the principle of "no one should be left behind", ensuring that even the most remote communities receive the support they need. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the celebration of Fiji Day, a team will be also going to Vanua Levu, soon after the official function, we will be engaged in Bua for two days.

Our commitment to ensuring that justice is right for all Fijians, not just a privilege for a select few, is unwavering. I would like to recognise the previous Government's efforts in establishing BDM in Savusavu, Nabouwalu and Korovou, which made these essential services more accessible. Additionally, in partnership with Post Fiji, we have expanded BDM services to 20 post offices across the country, further enhancing access to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, investing in human capital is essential to the Ministry's success. Over the past months, we have launched comprehensive Leadership and Customer Service Training programs, aimed at enhancing our staff's skills and competencies. These initiatives are central to cultivating a culture of leadership, professionalism and excellence within the Ministry.

The introduction of improvement systems has significantly streamlined our operations, boosting efficiency and service delivery. In July, we conducted a two-day inhouse training on Leadership Training for our team leaders emphasising the internal procedures and the roles of each officer. This training is part of our ongoing effort to position ourselves as premier ministry.

Additionally, several team leaders visited the Fiji Airways Headquarters in Nadi to gain valuable insight into customer service excellence, particularly focusing on benchmarking and the concept of self-reflection to drive internal improvements. I also met with the Acting Permanent Secretary of Justice, the Director of Corporate Services and all heads of Registries to address challenges and discuss necessary improvements to facilitate public service delivery across Fiji. By equipping our staff with the necessary tools and training, we ensure that they are well prepared to meet the demands of their roles and deliver exceptional service to the public.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight the significant milestone through the collaboration between the Ministry of Justice and iTaukei Affairs, aimed at enhancing the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* (VKB) system. This partnership underscores our commitment to making Government services more accessible while preserving traditional governance systems. The VKB is crucial for the iTaukei people as it serves as a living document that records ancestral lineages and family roots. However, challenges have arisen, particularly with the timely updating of birth and death records, leading to disputes over land ownership and chief appointments. I am excited to announce that the VKB as a pilot project had commenced, with the officers from VKB based at the Ministry for Justice for one month and to report to the two consultants who are currently undergoing the review of the VKB system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is an honour for the opportunity to speak on the Ministry of Justice.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Members of Parliament, fellow citizens. While the honourable Minister's words attempt to portray a story of success, the reality faced by the people of Fiji tells a very different tale. The Minister boasts about progress and achievements, yet the experiences of ordinary Fijians, those who must navigate a complex and often inaccessible justice system remain plagued by delays, bureaucracy and lack of support.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. K.K. LAL.- The Ministry speaks of enhancing access to justice, but I ask the honourable Minister where is the access when people's cases are backlogged for many years and victims of injustice are left in the dark without resolution to answers?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the so-called strategic vision is nothing but hollow words when it lacks tangible outcomes. The people of Fiji have had grand promises time and time again even during the 2022 General Election, but promises do not pay for legal fees, nor do they shorten the wait times for hearings and judgements. The Ministry must address the serious challenges of delayed court proceedings, lack of legal aid for vulnerable groups and overwhelming complexities for our judicial purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also find it disingenuous for the honourable Minister to speak of the Ministry's progress and strategic vision when the same honourable Minister remains silent during the recent debate of the reintroduction of the death penalty. When the honourable Minister for Women made a shocking statement calling for the death penalty for drug traffickers, where was the voice of the honourable Minister for Justice? How can the Ministry claim to be a Ministry for Justice, when it fails to speak up on fundamental human rights? Silence on such critical issues speaks volumes. It suggests a lack...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. Point of Order! I think the honourable Member should stick to the topic. Standing Order 60 and stop meandering. He needs to stop misleading Parliament, there has been no debate in Parliament on this issue, and no introduction of it, and he needs to be factual about it when he is presenting on it. Stick to the relevance of the Ministerial Statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- You may continue.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir. Silence on such a critical issues speaks volumes. It suggests a lack of true commitment to justice, fairness and the protection of rights enshrined in the 2013 Constitution. To the honourable Minister for Justice, it is your duty not just to promote policies and strategies, but to ensure that the Government and its independent institutions

uphold the 2013 Constitution, the very foundation of our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Constitution guarantees the rights and freedoms of every Fijian, and it is the responsibility of the Ministry to protect these rights without compromise. This is not just a legal obligation, but a moral one. If we are to build a justice system that is truly accessible, efficient and equitable, we need more than words, we need genuine reform, especially your service delivery. Honourable Kirpal was not wrong, he was right! Especially about Fijians who do not own land. You need to improve your service delivery and perform well, honourable Minister. While the honourable Minister for Justice may seek to reassure us with grand statements and statistics, the Opposition will continue to hold this Government to account. We will ensure that the voices of ordinary Fijians are heard, and that the justice system serves them, not just the privileged few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also attended the launch of the Sexual Orientation Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Handbook, which was funded by the UK Government, and there are various case studies of injustices against fellow Fijians which are shocking. I invite the honourable Minister to read this book to gain more knowledge of the issues facing our vulnerable in our society. At the same time, we have the NDP. If the honourable Minister would go to sub-chapter 8.1, there is more to talk about injustice in the Ministry.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must humbly request all honourable Members of Parliament to show our unwavering support for the poppy appeal in honour of our brave Military Forces. Let us not also forget the importance of Pinktober, as we stand in solidarity with our cancer survivors and advocate for the health and well-being of our people.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the leader of the G9-Bloc or his designate.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for Justice for the Ministerial Statement. It was very informative, highlighting the progress that the ministry has done so far in enhancing its service delivery.

I think if the honourable Ketan Lal was listening to the last ministerial statement by the Minister for Justice, he had touched about the backlog in court cases. So, the focus on the ministerial statement today was on the birth, deaths and marriages (BDM) and also other services that have been taken to the maritime areas and also in conjunction with the REACH Programme with Ministry of Education where we saw some new couples had their wedding on the government vessel.

I thank the honourable minister for the service delivery done so far and we hope to move to other parts, Vanua Levu, I think the honourable Minister should not forget Vanua Levu if not we will have to return all the 'kai Vanualevu' in Viti Levu. There is also a call from the Honourable Naupoto and the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, not to forget Vanua Balavu and other parts of Lau.

A very important issue that you have raised, that is for the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB) officer that is now attached with the consultant at the Ministry of Justice given that we were moving around with this Child Justice Bill and Child Care and Protection Bill, and that is one of the things that came up. Given that most of our villagers do not register their children in the VKB and they are denied their fair share of lease money too.

Given if this service delivery is enhanced because one of the requirements is the birth certificate, and also when you come to elections too, some people do not go to vote because they do not have a voter card because they do not have a birth certificate. In some cases, some school students do not have birth certificates and they find it very hard to go for enrolment to go to schools.

Also, in one of our consultations, we found out, and probably just another suggestion honourable Minister to add on to enhancing the services, that is to have a system that connects the Ministry of Health when a baby is delivered and at that same time it hits that system for registration of birth certificates. That also allows the mother and the child for other grant services that are available for newborn.

A system that should allow that particularly child to be registered automatically in the VKB through the system. This could be something that could improve the system as we move on, thank you very much honourable Minister for the service delivery that was done so far to reach out to the maritime areas and to the interior parts of Fiji, where most of the people when they go out, they want these services to come to their doorsteps. Because they have to pay transportation fees and also bus fares to come to areas, even have to by boats to come to Viti Levu, Suva and taking these services to their doorsteps will really help them a lot.

We thank the Coalition Government for bringing these services and taking it to another level where the FijiFirst Government had reached, we have taken it to another level. Vinaka, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER. – Interesting, thank you so much for the comments and now we will move on honourable Members. What has been highlighted by the honourable Minister for Justice is something that we should seriously take note of and that is the VKB, reviewing it, and there is a need for the Minister of i-Taukei Affairs to see how best to take into account, those who have blood ties et cetera. Especially with our vasu's and those that are part European. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### MOU - NZYWAM and Ministry of Health (Question No. 215/2024)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Youth with a Mission (YWAM) New Zealand and the Ministry?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member, for his question. In terms of the MOU between the Ministry of Health and Youth With A Mission (YWAM). The signing of the two parties was endorsed by Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> of August and Friday 4<sup>th</sup> of August consecutively.

In terms of the MOU itself, the MOU allows for the partnership between YWAM and the Ministry of Health to assist the Ministry in terms of service delivery and in reaching universal health coverage to our hard-to-reach populations within Fiji, mostly in the rural and maritime areas.

The MOU is a 10-year MOU in which the agreement allows for volunteers under the YWAM to come over to Fiji and work in this space of primary healthcare settings within our maritime and rural areas which is accessible by boat. They come in their ship and assist the Ministry in those areas as it is in terms of work that they are doing, not only in terms of primary healthcare but also in terms

of awareness, screening, dental, which I am sure the honourable Member is well aware of.

As I have said, this partnership is for 10 years and what we have noticed that even though they are cutting on yearly basis. This partnership moving forward, we will have to come up with ideas on how to streamline some of the processes that are involved in registration, in issues such as procurement and customs as well. So, we are grateful for the ongoing partnership. It started from the previous government until now, and the Ministry is ensuring that we will continue with this because they are assisting us in a very critical space, the primary healthcare especially in the maritime island areas.

In a nutshell it is a 10-year MOU and I will be willing to answer any more questions based particular things.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, last month, the shippers in the Yasawa Group saw over 2,400 patients who needed dental, general health checkup, nutrition, health education and optometry, on the boat and they gave out reading glasses. Because it is a boat, it only serve the maritime island. Over the last three years they have seen over 11,000 Fijians in the maritime zone.

The supplementary question to the honourable Minister, would he consider the waiver of the temporary registration licence that the doctors, nurses, dentists that are on this boat need to pay with the Fiji Medical and Dental Council, since they are providing free service benefitting our people?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank, honourable Ravunawa for his supplementary question. Yes, that is something we will consider, seeing that it is a 10 year agreement and an agreement of understanding. Also, most of the visiting teams are the same ones that are coming in and out on the same year. So, yes, we will take that into consideration and see how best we can assist them as they are assisting us.

St. Giles Psychiatric Hospital Facelift and Upgrade  
(Question No. 228/2024)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the St. Giles Psychiatric Hospital facelift and upgrade?.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Tuicolo for his question. In terms of the update to Parliament on St. Giles Psychiatric Hospital facelift and upgrade. Just by way of context, St. Giles hospital is one of the oldest hospitals in Fiji and has been in service since 1884.

Again, it has lived through many climatic and operational challenges and the current infrastructure has undergone significant wear and tear over the years. With the increasing service demands, increasing number of patients of all ages are seen, treated, admitted and followed up at the hospital, it places a considerable demand on the infrastructure.

Patients seen at that hospital range from acute, chronic psychiatric illness, substance abuse and forensic psychiatric cases. Any infrastructural works that have been done over the years was to cater for changing demand in patient demographics, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It has also been a tertiary care training hospital for many years through Fiji Medical School and now FNU.

In the last two years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while working with our development partners and

through budgetary allocation, our health partners and development partners have come on board to assist us with the Women's Ward and the Moala Ward and the admin building which was renovated and now occupied.

Another significant work that was completed involved the tarsealing of the roads and carpark inside the hospital premises which cost over \$235,000. The road had not been repaired for a number of years causing not only discomfort to passengers and damages to the vehicles, but also to staff who work and live within the vicinity of St. Giles Hospital.

Earlier this year, the Ministry constructed a new fence behind the Men's Ward costing around \$13,000 to improve the security of the admission facility as was highlighted in the media, and in this financial year, the ministry has also allocated funding to the minor works allocation for further repair and renovation works at the hospital.

In addition, constant development and advancement of medicine worldwide, the ministry is approaching partner and donor organisation for the possibility of assisting towards the establishment of a new facility that will allow the hospital to venture into the latest treatment modalities, elevating mental health services in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a new facility will allow the hospital to branch out into the fields of addiction, psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry and old age psychiatry and to deliver speciality services such as group therapy, psychodrama, lithium level testing, recurrent transcranial magnetic stimulation, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as it commonly known, and geropsychiatry. Again, government remains committed to addressing mental health in the country and improving the mental health services to our people.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, are we sufficiently equipped at St. Giles to take care of, at the moment whilst the upgrades are being done and post building later on building a new facility, are we sufficiently equipped at St. Giles to take care of the substance abuse patients? I am talking about those that came out of prison or currently in and who are incarcerated and those that doctors find that are suffering from mental trauma and are substance abuse patients.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when asked the same question to our technical people at St. Giles, the answer I got was yes, in terms of the capacity, yes, and they are currently doing it right now. But in terms of the treatment afterwards on substance abuse, and how you deal with it afterwards, that is where the gaps still lies and that is where the government through the partnerships that I had mentioned, that we are approaching other development partners to assist us in this area on substance abuse and its treatment in the long term.

Again, it is something that the ministry with our development partners are looking into, but in terms of your question, the capacity right now as it is, yes, to look after it in the acute phase and treat them accordingly. And also, available in our other hospitals in CWM and for areas which other NGO's assist us in this space, which receive grant through the Ministry of Health for some of their operational work they are also helping us in this area. In a nutshell, yes, we have the capacity to deal with it now, but it is the long-term aspect of the treatment that is where they still get.

MR. SPEAKER.— *Vinaka*. Let me know for the supplementary questions, we will move on to the third Oral Question for today. I now call on honourable Ketan Lal to ask his question.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.— Then that question lapses now, so we will move to the fourth Oral Question

for today.

Dental Prosthetic Services - Nakasi Health Centre  
(Question No. 248/2024)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the status of the Dental Prosthetic Services at Nakasi Health Centre?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honorable Ravunawa for his question. In terms of the Dental Prosthetic Unit that is currently under the CWM Hospital but is operational in Nakasi Health Centre, that was an arrangement made by the previous Administration, due to the fact that there was an issue with the space within the Dental Department here at CWM. It was just for a temporary measure until space can be identified and then move back into CWM Hospital.

As it is, there are a few options that are available that the Ministry is looking into on how to bring back the prosthetic services back to CWM. Option one right now is the School of Dentistry and Oral Health, under FNU for the JB Savou Dental Clinic adjacent the CWM Dental waiting room is currently being used by clinical studies and to be used by the prosthetic team, that is one option. And the other option is for the occupation of the former FNBC office, as dental officers and dental staff interim with current office and staff, to be refurbished as a prosthetic clinic and prosthetic lab.

As it is, the ministry is also looking into the decentralising this service into the subdivisional hospitals, Savusavu in particular, we have talked with the dental officers there, and they are very skilled in doing dental prosthetic services, but it is just the space that they need to be working into. It should be made conducive to the environment in which they work in.

Nevertheless, as I have mentioned the move from CWM to Nakasi was a temporary measure, and they are still there, and the ministry is trying its best to relocate them back to CWM because it is Central. It is the only one available, I believe for the central and eastern division. And yes, in terms of plans for the future we will relocate them because it was a temporary measure in the initial stages. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation  
(Question No. 249/2024)

HON. I. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the outcomes of the recent Second Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation and the Delhi Declaration?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Vanawalu for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I led the Fiji delegation to the recent 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation held in New Delhi, India on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2024. The Conference was hosted by the Government of India, as always, the arrangements for the Fiji team was superb. I say always, as from experience, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when a Fijian is hosted by the Indian Government, hospitality goes up, another notch, I have experienced this Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I also wish to thank our High Commissioner to India, His Excellency Mr. Jagannath Sami, and his dear wife, Kancha, for supporting the Fiji delegation and likewise, Counsellor Nilesh Kumar. The Conference was a pivotal event for the region, addressing the evolving challenges in civil aviation and setting a collective vision for the future through the adoption of the Delhi Declaration. The Conference was chaired by honourable Ram Mohan Naidu, Minister for Civil Aviation for India. I was privileged and honored to be elected as a Deputy Chairperson. This position not only highlights Fiji's leadership and commitment to the civil aviation sector, but also ensures that we have a direct influence in shaping the region's aviation policies moving forward.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation took place in Beijing, China in 2018. The Conference resulted in the Beijing Declaration, it has laid the framework, groundwork for states to collaborate to achieve shared commitments and take the necessary actions to address these challenges confronting the aviation sector. Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, Fiji has made significant strides in advancing aviation safety and security oversight. Our effective implementation score stands above the global average, a testament to a commitment to maintain rigorous safety standards.

Following the Inaugural Conference, 2018, the International Civil Aviation Organization co-hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia-Pacific Conference with the Government of India, gathering over 200 delegates to discuss commitments and reflect on the aviation industry, while addressing sustainability. Those in attendance included 12 Ministers, eight Deputy Ministers and 24 Director Generals of civil aviation. The Prime Minister of India, the honourable Narendra Modi made the closing address, demonstrated great ideas and its critical component of India's economic development.

While some commitments since 2018 have made satisfactory progress. The majority of safety and annual targets have failed to meet expectations. The shortfall is primarily due to the pandemic which has plunged the global civil aviation sector into a deep crisis. A significant outcome of the Conference resulted in 29 Asia Pacific nations committing to landmark shift towards sustainable aviation, enhance safety and technological innovation.

Accelerating efforts to reduce the region's environmental impact was one of the key outcomes of the Conference. This is in line with the global framework that International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Member States agreed upon at the ICAO's 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Aviation and Alternative Fuels (CAAF/3) that I had chaired in Dubai last November. This aviation industry is committed to achieving a collective global aspiration vision to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in international aviation by 5 percent by 2030. This, through the use of sustainable aviation fuel, low carbon aviation fuels and other aviation cleaner energies.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is undertaking a feasibility study into the production of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) in Fiji involving both Fiji Airways and Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC). Emphasis was put on the critical role of accelerating progress towards gender equality in the sector, and further efforts was needed to ensure gender equity in aviation across the region to meet the human resource demands of aviation sectors rapid expansion. A significant commitment by the Aviation Ministers of the Asia and Pacific region was the adoption of the Delhi Declaration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this declaration reaffirms support and continuous efforts towards realising the commitments of the prior Beijing Declaration. These commitments come at a crucial time for the aviation industry which is rebounding from COVID-19. The Declaration outlines several key commitments including:

- (1) Supporting the implementation of ICAO's global plans for safety, air navigation and aviation security.
- (2) Accelerating the adoption of new technologies to enhance safety and efficiency.
- (3) Investing in infrastructure to support sustainable growth and emerging aviation consumptions.
- (4) Promoting gender equality across all levels of the aviation sector.
- (5) Reducing emissions and other environmental impacts of aviation.
- (6) Enhancing regional cooperation in air traffic management, search and rescue and aviation security.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker Sir, Fiji fully supports the Delhi Declaration and stands committed to implementing its principles of safety, security and innovation. This Declaration marks a significant step forward for civil aviation in the Asia Pacific region and Fiji is ready to collaborate with our regional partners to meet the aviation challenges of today and tomorrow. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.— I just have a small supplementary question. Honourable Minister, I congratulate you on your attendance at the Delhi Conference and in terms of the Delhi Declaration that has actually transpired, my question is relating to implementation. Whether it is Fiji or whether it is regional, how are we going to ensure that we actually implement those things that have come up within the Declaration, and my question, you may know, probably leads towards sustainable aviation, fuels et cetera that particular aspect of it.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Beijing and Delhi Declaration came out of this huge growth in travel by air in the Asia Pacific region and our concern is that we need to make travel seamless. There are about 29 Flight Information Regions (FIR) within the Asia Pacific and these FIR need to be talking to each other and seamless when you pass through from one to the next.

Our concern is that not everyone is on board in terms of safety, in terms of security, and other requirements by ICAO. We need to be singing from the same page, across the Asia Pacific region. As I had mentioned the other day, Fiji's score in the last audit was sitting higher than the average regional and global score, so Fiji is doing well. The challenge is our Pacific neighbours, so we need to help them grow their aviation industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what came out of this, is that Governments needs to commit. We know that travel by air is critical, but you cannot have a State not doing its part because we are all connected in travel. If you could just allow me, Sir, there was North Korea in the meeting and you know when North and South Korea are in a meeting one stands up and one speaks. These people normally, if you test your missiles into the atmosphere, you will notify the commercial, you know, airlines and all that, that I will be testing my missiles over these.

But the North Koreans have been known to be firing the missiles into parts that are taken by airlines. That is the kind of stuff we want to discipline. It is called Notice to Airmen (NOTAM). Interestingly over the last two days, Iran was firing into Israel. They did not notify the commercial aviation people that they were firing missiles over the area. So, that is the kind of discipline that we need in aviation, because we are all too good in this. The underlying principle is that it must be seamless, it must be safe, and it must all subscribe to the sense of safety when you are flying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, anyway, in terms of the government you need to commit, and I am happy that every time I present my budget to the honourable Minister for Finance in aviation, he does not compromise. Thank you.



HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am happy to hear that the Minister for Finance consistently assists you, but will he be assisted by ICAO also with respect to the original issue that you are talking about? We know the value of everyone working off the same page. By the way, I have flown to South Korea whilst the ICBM has been flown across by North Korea. I know, it is a very scary thing. Will we be getting assistance from ICAO in terms of the regional issue so that everyone can sing off the same page, because aviation security, as you rightfully pointed out, it needs to be everyone singing from the same tune sheet.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we opened the Pacific Liaison Office (PLO) in Nadi two months or three months ago. This is the Pacific Liaison Office for ICAO. Fiji is hosting this. The salary is paid for by Singapore, but we provide the premises in Nadi for the PLO. That is our contribution to the region, and this office is going to provide training and support for our island SIDS. So, ICAO is helping in that area.

MR. SPEAKER.- Just before we continue with the questions, bit of housekeeping and for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders, with respect to the sitting time, now I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament, to move his suspension motion.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, 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 remaining items listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have few questions to go through in Schedule 1 and Written Question. In addition, number nine Consideration of Bills, which we will be discussing today.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any. I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply, also if any.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Sir, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **QUESTIONS**

Revival and Documentation of Native iTaukei Dialects  
(Question No. 250/2024)

HON. A. TUICOLO asked the Government upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament on any plans to revive and document the native iTaukei dialects of Fiji?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Tuicolo for the question. Please, allow me to answer the question in the vernacular.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka.*

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, *ni bera saka ni'u sauma na taro, au kerea me'u vakavinavinakataka vakalevu vei kemuni ena kena bau nanumi ka vakadonui meda dau vosataka na noda vosa ena loma ni Bose Lawa.*

*Turaga na Sipika, e rauta ni 300 taucoko na veimataqali vosa ni vanua ena noda Viti, ia, na toso ni gauna, esa mai yali kina eso na rorogo dina ni vosa vakavanua ena so na noda vanua e Viti. Na veisau ogo, e vakavuna e levu sara na ka, me vaka na veisau ni rorogo ni vosa, na kena vakayagataki, ka so, ena kena vakarabailevutaki se tomani na vosa mai na kena ka dina taumada, ka sa vakavuna vakalevu talega na veisau ni vanua kei na kena i tovo.*

*Ena cakacaka vakavoleka na Tabana ni Vosa kei na i Tovo ni Tabacakacaka iTaukei kei na veitabana vaka-Matanitu eso, na vei koronivuli torocake, o ira na kena daunivosa, kei na veitabana tale eso ena kena qaravi na i tuvatuva.*

*Esa qarava tiko na Tabacakacaka iTaukei na vuli ni tovo kei na vosa. Ena vakavulici ena matanavotu ka vakakina ena mona livaliva. Na i tuvatuva ogo e vukea na kena marautaki ka kilai na totoka ni veimataqali vosa duidui vanua kei na kena i vakarau. Sa vukea talega vakalevu na veimaliwai vakavanua, vakaturaga, kei na kena dokai ka vakabibitaki na vei domo kece ni vanua.*

*Ena veivuli ni veivakararamataki e dau qarava na Tabacakacaka iTaukei, esa vukea talega na veimaliwai vaka-matatamata kei na kena rokovi na veimataqali tovo vakavanua kei na kena vosa. E dau qaravi na i tuvatuva ogo ena kena qaravi na veisisivi vosa ena soqo ni Ratu Sukuna Day, veisoqo vakayasana kei na tikina, ka vaka kina na veisoqo e dau vakayacori ena loma ni noda veikoro lelevu vakacakacaka.*

*Ena i ka 21 ni Veverueri ena yabaki ogo, e dau qaravi kina na kena marautaki na Siga ni Noda Vosa Vakavanua e vuravura taucoko. Na bibi ni soqo, sa i koya na kena vakabulabulataki na veivosa ni vei vanua, ka vakabibi na maroroi kei na kena vakabulai tale na veivosa ni vanua ka sa voleka sara ni kawaboko. E sa vakauqeta talega na cakacaka ni kena vakaivolataki na vosa vakavanua, ka me na kakua vakadua ni yali.*

*Na Tabacakacaka e dau qarava talega na kena marautaki na Siga ni Taukei ni Vanua ka dau marautaki e vuravura taucoko ena vula ko Okosita. E dau qaravi talega kina na kena vakabulabulataki na vosa vaka-Viti kei na vosa ni veivanua tale vakaturaga ena noda vanua. E vakaukauwataka talega na noda kila na kawa i Taukei na kena maroroi na noda vosa.*

*Ena kena dau marautaki na vei siga vakaoqo, ena tomani tiko kina na sasaga ni kena maroroi ka vakabulai na noda i tovo kei na noda vosa ni vanua. Ena kena vakaivolataki, esa vakacavara na Tabacakacaka iTaukei na cakacaka ni kena mapetaki na i tukutuku makawa ni vanua ena loma ni 1,172 na koro e Viti. E na kena maroroi vakaivola na vei tukutuku ogo, e vakayagataki sara ga kina na vosa dina ni veivanua era qaravi kina.*

*Esa vakarautaki oti tu na sova ni tukutuku me na maroroi kina na veivuku makawa vaka-Viti, na vei vanua kei na kena i tovo, ka sa na qaravi tiko ena gauna ogo na k na savati na veitukutuku ka ra maroroi mai. Ni oti, era sa na qai maroroi yani ena loma ni sova ni tukutuku.*

*Turaga na Sipika, na i Vola Vosa se na dictionary ni vosa, esa mai tavoci oti e na 2007. Ia, esa tomani tiko na vakadidike kei na kena talevi ka vakavou na lewe ni Vola Vosa. Ena veivuke ni iTaukei Trust Fund Board, esa mai biu kina na i Vola Vosa ena mona livaliva, ka sa rawa nira na raica kina na lewenivanua.*

*E dua tale na sala ni kena maroroi na noda vosa, sa i koya na kena vakabulabulataki na noda i tovo. E 32 na i wasewase ni tovo vaka-Viti ka sa mai vakabulabulataki ogo, me vaka na meke vakavanua kei na meke ni yaqona. E qaravi na kena vola i tukutukutaki e na kedra dui vosa dina vakavanua. Keitou sa cakacaka vakavoleka tale tikoga kei na Univesiti ni Ceva ni Pasivika ena kena mapetaki na mona livaliva ena noda vosa.*

*Na neitou cakacaka ogo kei na Univesiti ni Ceva ni Pasivika, e qaravi kina na kena mapetaki vakamatailalai na noda vosa ena ka e vakatokai na Geographic Information System (GIS). Na cakacaka ogo, ena sega walega ni vakaukauwataka na noda kila na noda dui vosa, ena vukea talega na kena maroroi.*

*Sa mai vakarautaki oti talega ena I Tabacakacaka iTaukei na i tuvatuva se na National Action Plan ni kena vakananumi tiko na Vosa ni Taukei ni Vanua e Vuravura ka na qaravi e na loma ni tini na yabaki. E vakatokai na i tuvatuva ogo me Dugele ni Vosa ni Vanua, ka kena i bole tiko na, “Noqu Vosa, Noqu Vanua, me Baleti ira na Noqu Kawa.”*

*Turaga na Sipika, e ka ni marau ni keitou sa tekivu raica na kena sa bula tale tiko mai na kena qaravi ena vei koronivuli na kena vakabulai na noda i tovo kei na vosa. Ena vei koronivuli torocake, sa toso cake tikoga na levu ni kerekere keitou ciqoma ena kena kerei na neitou veivakararamataki. Sa toso cake talega na levu ni gone era via vulica ena vei Univesiti na vulici ni noda vosa.*

*Ena kena sa vakarautaki tu na 10 na yabaki ogo me 10 na yabaki ni kena maroroi na noda vosa kei na i tovo, ena levu tale na i tuvatuva ena qarava na Tabacakacaka me sotava na i naki ni kena maroroi na noda vosa. Vinaka vakalevu.*

MR. SPEAKER.- I think, through that question, the honourable Minister has really challenged the Fijian diaspora to see how best it can retain this very much important part of our identity, and that is our language. Whilst we were seeking the official language to be part of our language to confirm what is in the Constitution and what we practice, we took a leaf out of India. They have 20 official languages and about 7,000 languages, and yet still speak their languages in their very own Parliament.

Some prefer to speak in English, some begin with their own vernacular, and then they suddenly change to English. But for us, it is a whole new challenge, and with respect to what the Ministry is undertaking. For me, my tribe originated from Vanualevu, we still have our links there. We still have our *yavu* there. But in Taveuni, the dialect sounds funny now because we are speaking most of our communication in the Bauan dialect and that is unbecoming.

When we say tomorrow in the real Cakaudrove dialect, we say *se bogi caca ni sou bogi*, in the Bauan dialect it is just *ni mataka* and our young children are speaking that. Road is *wa'olo*, in the Bauan dialect it is *gaunisala*. So, there is a big mix there.

Since we were relocated to Taveuni, we confronted the Lauan, upper Lauan and the Laucala dialect and that gives us a very difficult time, especially when we try and reintroduce our own genuine dialect. It is quite difficult, but I think we will push ahead with that and that remains a challenge for us to undertake.

Participation of Women and Youth in Co-operatives  
(Question No. 251/2024)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament how the Ministry is working towards increasing participation of women and youth in Co-operatives?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Vocea for his question. Of course, I had spoken about co-operatives in terms of overall registration and the positive impact it has been having in terms of rural livelihoods.

As we all know, the co-operatives are ideal as well for women and youth participation in economic activities and is actually quite a valuable tool when it comes to empowering women and youth by creating income generating activities. Of course, the Ministry of Trade is very committed, Sir, to fostering inclusive economic growth and specifically focusing on expanding the role of women and youth in co-operatives.

Just by way of some data, Sir, in the West alone, we witnessed in terms of membership, an increase of about 148 percent for women, female membership, raising the proportion of women cooperatives in total from 12 percent to 24 percent over the last year. This growth has been the result of some comprehensive outreach campaigns, tailored training programmes and financial support systems that have started encouraging more women participation, and I refer particularly to the Ministry of Women, who have been advocating strongly for women in business and of course, other multilateral organisation as well.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we recognise that Fiji's youth represent a tremendous opportunity as well for cooperative growth. I would like to specifically call out the honourable Minister for Youth who has communicated a message to all our young men and women and where they want to set up business initiatives, that they do them through cooperatives. And so similarly, we are seeing encouraging signs in terms of the growth of cooperatives, youth-based cooperatives, and we will continue to focus on that. As we know, young people bring fresh ideas and entrepreneurial spirit that comes with youth, Sir, that can propel cooperatives going forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just sighting some examples of where we have collaborated, in terms of women, and also youth. I will just pick two examples, Sir. I think we all have heard of Rise Beyond the Reef. This is a very innovative and excellent women empowerment programme. They have just opened their first shop in Denarau, I think. Before they used to supply through Amazon and supply on an order basis. I believe they are also in Tappoos in terms of selling their products. Recently they have opened their shop, and we have been assisting them on and off for some time, including during honourable Koya's time. The models, Sir, and the way it is setup, the ladies are sewing in their various homes and then they bring their product together to a central location, and then it is delivered to the distribution centre.

One of the team came up with the idea of actually helping fund the sewing machines for these ladies. So, right now, we have just recently funded up to 14 members of the Rise Beyond the Reef women to the amount of \$11,988 and the bulk of that money has been used to buy sewing machines and you could say, producing more in terms of income.

In terms of the Ministry for Youth, we are moving around with the Ministry for Youth in terms of some of the programmes that they are doing. One of the ones that comes to mind is the recent Yasayasa Moala Youth Festival in Lau, where we conducted cooperative awareness and registration for participating youth groups. Later this month as well, Sir, we will be visiting Kadavu to conduct awareness sessions and registration to enable them to effectively participate in economic activities. Of course, Sir, with the challenges of drugs that we are facing, these initiatives are ways of addressing the challenge with drugs and trying to encourage our youth to be productive members of our society and move away from the vagaries of drugs Sir.

Of course, the Ministry also works very closely with the Ministry of Women, as I have mentioned, and currently we are also working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through a programme called Markets for Change to empower and formalise successful women groups into co-operatives.

Through some of these targeted approaches we have been able to register about 60 successful women led co-operatives. Formalisation of these women groups as co-operatives has opened up new opportunities such as, easier access to grants, particularly The Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) which is very popular, which is facilitated by the Ministry. There is a later discussion about access to finance Bill later today, and that again will increase the opportunity for our co-operatives and MSME's to actually access capital which is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to Micro, Small to Medium Enterprises and Co-operatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking ahead, the Ministry is committed to both, Women and Youth in co-operatives, through more gender and youth sensitive policies. Over the last 3 years, a total of 398 women and youth have been appointed to Board positions in respective co-operatives, so that is an interesting and positive development as well.

In terms of other initiatives, we are partnering with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations to continue to align our initiatives to global best practices on gender equality and youth empowerment. This will certainly allow us to implement new programmes, enhance existing ones, ensuring that the Fiji co-operative sector is not only inclusive but sustainable as well.

The success that we have seen so far, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a testament, of course, the effectiveness of the prior Government initiatives and all we are doing is continuing to fine tune them. As I have mentioned in my previous speech, we do have a grant now that is specifically targeted to co-operatives, and we shall be utilising that. We are about to advertise that programme soon and this of course, will ensure that the co-operative movement continues to grow and hopefully directly address issues such as poverty alleviation in Fiji. *Vinaka saka.*

HON. P.D. KUMAR. –Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister spoke at length about what women co-operatives, I would like to hear a little bit more about the youth co-operatives.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I thought I had covered both adequately, I guess just some statistics that I did not read out. In the last couple of months, we have launched about 10 youth-based co-operatives from the awareness programmes that we are doing.

What we are trying to do is encourage more youth to actually look at things such as farming opportunities within their respective areas because there are some successful youth co-operatives from the Tailevu area that came from the previous administration and that is working well. There are good co-operatives both in women and the youth currently in play and I am happy to provide more information if you need it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I do understand that some of the most successful co-operatives are women co-operatives currently on the books at the Ministry, but in terms of the youth, will the Co-operative Department, if it has not already, tried to see if we can tap into our school leavers and get into the education system to educate them regarding the co-operatives and how beneficial it can be? I say this, not lightly, honourable Minister, but because you build very good bonds whilst you were at school and those bonds can be taken through into business, et cetera, especially targeting the rural areas where the education system can incorporate maybe sessions with our cooperative people so the school leavers can see that there is an avenue to make some decent dole out of cooperatives.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank honourable Koya for that question. There is a move afoot to move down the awareness and education for co-operatives and MSMEs into education. You will recall that I think the TELS actually is launching an entrepreneurial university level entrepreneurial programme in this Budget. The allocation is about half a million, so that is a start.

We are really keen to move the education of entrepreneurship into the education curriculum and we have been talking to the Ministry of Education. There are some service providers that are talking to the Ministry of Education at the moment in terms of moving the entrepreneurship down to education level. Generally, at the moment, entrepreneurship seems to be a vocation when we hit our forties and fifties like a pre-retirement vocation, but we believe from what we are seeing, there is massive entrepreneurial spirit with our youth and with our young and with the right encouragement and the right policy settings, we will create a more vibrant sort of entrepreneurial movement at that age level. It is a work in progress, education system, the curriculums being developed right now, and I certainly have had meetings with the service providers who are keen to provide education and training in that space.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question to the honourable Minister is more related to youth unemployment, and from your presentation we hear that there are not many youth co-operatives as compared to women and women cooperatives are there because it is out of necessity. They have to run their families, et cetera. How do you intend to really engage the youth so they can go into co-operatives and make things better for themselves and for their families?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- One of the things that we are doing right now is actually engaging a lot with the Ministry of Youth, particularly when they do festivals, we have a massive youth converging on a location. We are using that as the main opportunity to try and encourage youth, to sort of get involved in co-operatives. That is the main principal way that we are dealing with the co-operatives for youth at the moment. We are finding some success, and we will continue with that and then look at other modalities. I think, certainly the education will probably encourage more young men and women to get involved.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Supplementary question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister. My question will be very specific due to the women co-operatives that used to work with Ministry of Fisheries for Mother Pearls Project. One is in Somosomo in Taveuni, one is in Raviravi in Macuata (next to Nakalou Village) and one is in Yaroi in Savusavu. They make pearls out of mother pearls after the pearl has been actually taken out. I want to know because these ladies had been established by NGOs and the Ministry of Fisheries went and built extra buildings for them to create. I just wanted to know about the project and how it is going especially with Justin Hunter having containers of mother pearls that have never been used and are just stored in containers.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- To be honest, I do not have the data with me at the moment. I will get that information and provide that to honourable Koroilavesau, but it is a good question. I

will check on that particular co-operative group.

MR. SPEAKER.- The one in Somosomo is running very well, run by women. They do not operate under a co-operative system, it is just loosely established by an NGO and then with the support of the Government. They have been provided with machines in how to make earrings, et cetera, but nothing beyond that.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That would be a good opportunity, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, Sir. We will take a break now, honourable Members for tea and when we resume, we will continue with the tenth Oral Question.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.17 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.57 p.m.

Managing Village and Community Affairs  
(Question No. 254/2024)

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU asked the Government, upon notice.

With the role of the Great Council of Chiefs being pivotal to the *iTaukei* people, especially in the rural village and *tikina* communities, can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament on how will the Government be able to manage village and community affairs with the universal individual freedoms espoused to by the international bodies, like the United Nations?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, balancing traditional village and community governance with the principle of universal individual freedom in Fiji is a delicate and sensitive task. We are navigating our way between protecting groups rights through customary law and upholding the Constitution, but generally there is a friction, and we want to set the tone of changing the laws, regulations and by-laws.

When the GCC was reinstated in 2023, it was entrapped between the evolving *iTaukei* community moving with the wind of change versus protecting the fabric of *iTaukei* society that is rooted in communal living. With guidance from the research that the Ministry is doing, we are looking at are few options.

Please, allow me to highlight a few possible areas that could be adopted by Government in order to manage the issue raised by the honourable Koroilavesau.

- (1) The customary law within Constitutional limits, where the Government can allow customary law and village governance system to operate as long as they do not infringe the Constitutional rights.
- (2) Clear guidelines could be established to ensure that traditional practice align with the national law.
- (3) Education and awareness - promoting awareness and educational programme can be rolled out to emphasise the importance of respecting individual rights while maintaining the value of community cohesion to reduce potential conflicts.
- (4) Consultative dialogue - continuous dialogue between the Government, chiefs and their community members can ensure that issues are resolved amicably.
- (5) Cultural sensitivity in policy implementation - when introducing new laws or reforms that promote individual freedoms, the Government should consult with local communities to make sure they understand the rationale and can adapt this reform without feeling that their traditional are under threat.
- (6) The legal mechanism for conflict resolution - establish a clear legal framework and special court that can help resolve conflict between individual rights and customary practice.
- (7) The gradual reform where village laws or tradition appears to infringe on individual freedom. Gradual reform might be preferable to allow for adaptation and reduce the risk of resistance.



- (8) Empowering of local leaders - traditional leaders can be empowered through training programmes that highlights both human rights and leadership in traditional context, to ensure that they become advocates for both cultural preservation and individual freedom. This is already proven through the *sausavou* and *sauvaki ni vanua* training programme.
- (9) Clear guideline on autonomy - the Government could outline areas where village council and customary law have jurisdictions and where the rights guaranteed by the Constitution must prevail. For instance, matter like land tenure or traditional ceremony might remain under village control while issues concerning individual rights, movement, education or political expression are managed by national law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the whole machinery of Government must respond to managing *iTaukei* community affairs. The reports of the review of GCC and the iTaukei Administrations have moved into these issues in more detail. In summary, the areas I have mentioned above will set the foundational limits of Government's effort to managing the issue raised by the honourable Member.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being no further questions and my apologies to the honourable Members that have already registered their questions, that is, from Question 252/2024 to Question No. 253/2024. I will now revert back to that, and I hope you will accept my apologies.

Engagement of Learning at School - Students and Teachers  
(Question No. 252/2024)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on how the Ministry ensures that Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary students and teachers are engaged in learning at school for the minimum required number of hours in a term?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I think the question is intended to be provided answers in two prongs. One is relating to resources and the other is probably related to processes within the Ministry of Education.

I will just provide some indications on the monitoring of teachers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, close to 900 schools are located around Fiji, given their geographical location and advantages and disadvantages of their location, reachability and connectivity. How we monitor the schools, one is through the Head of School. They are qualified and also, they know the basic teachings and learning plans that they should set out in terms of preparing for their respective classes in their respective schools, despite how far they are from the main centres and main headquarters, they are expected to perform; a very crucial role in the monitoring and assisting the teachers and students in their respective schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the teaching hours of the respective schools for early childhood, a minimum of 20 hours is required per week, primary school 36 hours per week and secondary school is 37.5 hours per week as expected too with all the teachers.

Every school has its own unique ethos and programmes in place and their programmes revolve around learning and teaching. We place a lot of emphasis on the trust that we give to the respective Heads of School and the teachers given the very crucial role that they play in nurturing the students in their respective schools.

At the early childhood level, the Ministry has taken pro-active measures to provide early

childhood children with a stimulating learning environment and encourages exploration, creativity and social interaction. Also, by promoting play-based learning and personalised attention, the Ministry aims to keep our youngest learners engaged and excited about coming to school each day.

For primary and secondary levels, the Ministry recognises the importance of maintaining a conducive learning environment that fosters academic growth and personal development. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive, engaging and relevant to catering the diverse needs and the interest of our students.

Sir, the Ministry understands the very crucial role that the teachers play in shaping the education of our students and we are committed to give the necessary support also. Some of these include cluster organised professional development sessions, collaborating with teacher training institutions in the specific areas of STEM subjects through the provision of resources and training to keep them motivated and engaged in their profession.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the honourable Minister remains very positive, I and the parents feel that there is some sort of disconnect with his Permanent Secretary and his staff because in the issue of appointment of new teachers, the students are suffering. The question to the honourable Minister is, parents have raised their issue of teachers resigning by the day and re-appointments are not happening. How is the honourable Minister going to mitigate this to ensure that teachers are there, our children get their education they deserve because this is about the future of this country. What are you going to do about it, honourable Minister?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not sure what is the question that has been raised by the honourable Member, but as I said, there are challenges in terms of resources, maybe that is the intention of the question.

The Ministry of Education is working towards mitigating those challenges in providing the necessary teachers. Some of the changes that were made in the previous government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is first they change the classification of schools from small, to medium to large, therefore, they allocated teaching resources accordingly which till to-date the teachers in their respective schools are still complaining because of the lack of teaching resources. For example, Dogotuki Primary School, it is a boarding school right in the interior of Macuata. They only have four teachers.

Boarding accommodates from ECE level. This is an ongoing issue that we are wanting to resolve. Without executive teachers and this is something that we wanted to address, by appointing executive teachers in these respective schools to address these teacher shortages and the minimum hours required to operate in a school environment.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there may be certain fields or subject areas where there are shortage of teachers and due to which the students are not taught for the minimum required number of hours. How is the Ministry addressing this?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- These are inherited issues which he was responsible for when he was in charge of Human Resources. The honourable Member is fully aware of the situation. Do not worry, we are working towards improving that by providing the necessary teachers as per needed by the respective school.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- You are asking a question, you want the reply and then all are talking. So, who is going to listen? We will continue to the next question.

Actions Taken to Alleviate Water Supply Shortage  
(Question No. 253/2024)

HON. K.V. RAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on what actions were taken to alleviate shortage of water supply to consumers during dry conditions and in which areas?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, water is a serious issue and I do understand how frustrating it can be. As I have already explained, the Water Sector 2050 Strategy considers an outcome of sustainability moving forward. But, of course, we face the ravages of climate change, and the Coalition Government is committed to addressing water issues, not only in terms of infrastructure but, of course, given the various challenges faced by climate change and the recent dry weather.

Some of the affected areas included the Tamavua System which impacted on Princess Road, Tovata, Deuba, Navua, Korovou and Vunidawa. In the Western Division, 15 water sources have been impacted and six critical levels. The 15 water sources include - Narara Dam, Nakasia, Nalau, Nasici, Balevuto, Waiwai, Varaciva, Vareqe, Vaturu and Sigatoka. Some critical ones in terms of the dry weather include - Narara, Nakasia, Balevuto, Babau and Varaqe.

In the Northern Division, areas impacted are Taganikula, Vunika, Nabouwalu, Bulileka, Dreketi and Seaqaqa.

Some of the mitigation measures taken and immediate actions, the water rationing and scheduling have been introduced. This included structure water rationing and scheduling programmes to assist communities in managing water shortages in the areas I had mentioned.

Of course, we have the free Water Tank Scheme. These have been distributed to various rural areas and also the affected areas and that scheme is still open. This Scheme enables residents, of course, to store water during water shortages and another temporary measure was the construction of temporary cofferdams. In the Western Division this was done at Varaciva, Nadrou and Qalau, and in in the Waimanu intake in the Central Division.

We continue with public awareness and advisories in these various areas and the need to conserve water in terms of the dry weather. Of course, there have been close consultation with the Ministry of Rural Development and Maritime. I thank the Commissioners in the various Divisions, given their close monitoring of the situation and close consultation with the Water Authority of Fiji, which enabled us to quickly move in terms of alleviating these issues. Some of the areas include Yanuca, Vatulele and Yasawa.

In terms of moving forward, of course, I had mentioned the leak detection. That is an ongoing work and long-term actions, which I will not repeat in terms of the investment of the water infrastructure I had mentioned yesterday. This is ongoing in terms of addressing the nation's water issues, and of course moving forward with the upcoming cyclone season, we will continue to monitor and work closely with the Ministry of Rural Development and Disaster Management to ensure that our citizens are adequately catered for, whatever the situation may arise.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. With respect to the closure of Water Authority of Fiji's water supply, certain times we have received complaints from citizens that WAF needs to think about the people, think about the children, the hospital workers and even

Parliament and do these maintenance works during the night when everyone is sleeping.

Just like today, we are notified that tomorrow our Parliament will be closed due to Water Authority of Fiji doing its maintenance work. Similarly, we have called the honourable Minister for Education to close the schools tomorrow, there could be situations where parents will be affected, and I thank the honourable Minister for listening to me. But he did not close the schools yet he is still contemplating but I urge the Government ....

MR. SPEAKER.- There are certain areas only that we have been advised that there will be closure.

HON. K.K. LAL.- I hope in future....

MR. SPEAKER.- No, you listen when I am talking, honourable Member. I think they caught on to the sickness coming from this side. They are firing questions and all the explanations going on, it is so difficult.

We have been advised that there will be closure and that is where it ends on the precincts of Parliament. We have taken the liberty to do all that we can to ensure that you are comfortable, honourable Members. The closure for the education, that is none of our business in Parliament. That is the honourable Minister's and the Government of the day. You have been talking for quite long, what is your question, or you forgot your question now?

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I think in terms of the water disruption, the actual work itself, the 900mm Viria to Waila connection, the work which will be done is part of the servicing strategy plan for the Viria Water Supply System to build the resiliency of the Suva-Nausori Water Supply System. The Waila System currently operates four major lift pumps to provide flow into the Wainibuku Reservoir which in turn supplies Tovata, Kalabu, Flagstaff, Nasinu, Nagatugatu, Dokainaisavu and Colo-i-Suva Reservoirs.

The service delivery risk that currently exist for the Waila System is the lack of backup for the existing pumping system, should a major failure of assets such as the switchboard transformer et cetera, occur reducing the pumping capacity. The risk has the potential to impact supply to approximately 40 percent of the Suva, Nausori population. The 900-millimetre connection to be connected this weekend is an important resiliency work as it provides the opportunity to provide additional supplementary flow to maintain service delivery, as much as possible, should any major fault occur in Waila.

Furthermore, once the Viria Treatment Plant capacity is expanded to 80 million litres per Day (MLD) from the existing 40 MLD, more flow will be available to be pushed into the Suva System via Waila through this connection which will be done through this weekend, ensuring capacity to meet current and future depends.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, I have a question for the honourable Minister, we seem to be promoting rainwater harvesting many in the rural areas. What is the plan for urban areas, rainwater harvesting system?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We are encouraging that too in terms of backup and we have allocated funding in the Water Authority of Fiji. Anyone who wishes to apply can apply for that. They will need to have a base and the piping system or the connection to the guttering. For me, it is

always good for you to have your backup at home because we never know what will happen, climate change and the extremes in the weather systems. If the water flow improves, anything can happen. During the cyclones, there can be a landslide which disrupts the waterpipe infrastructure or flood or anything. We have seen what happened in Northern Carolina, USA in last weekend, that is the most developed and richest nation, I suppose, but close to a million people are affected. My message to the nation, always have a backup in terms of rainwater harvesting.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- No, Sir.

Review of the Trade Policy Framework  
(Question No. 255/2024)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on what the Ministry's plans are on the Trade Policy Framework that is due for review next year?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's Trade Policy Framework is approaching its expiry. The last one was prepared by the former government from 2015 to 2025. Obviously, the plans are afoot to review it for its effectiveness, its impact, provide recommendations for future trade policies that will ensure that we continue to drive Fiji's economy, its development and also encourage more trading relations or healthy trading relations, Sir.

The Ministry of Trade, Sir, will be working with the Australian Government to develop the new trade policy. I guess, given what we are seeing in the economy and the myriad of significant opportunities that are approaching Fiji and underpinned by the global dynamics that continue to happen, technological advancements and, of course, climate change.

The next Trade Policy will be quite critical. When I say exciting things coming at us, Sir, for example, the *Google* investment will create a massive surge in ICT development in Fiji. We are seeing some of it already, I had a meeting at 8.30 last night with someone from United Kingdom, that is the type of interest that has been generated in the last few months.

Commercial agriculture, Sir, you have got Fiji Water in the country looking at serious commercial agriculture, there are few others that are coming through. These are the types of exciting opportunities that are coming, starting to emerge some serious interest in commercial aquaculture, Sir, and these are the things that the trade policy needs to address.

Some of the things that will be key with the new Trade Policy Framework will be the newly launched National Development Plan and the Foreign Policy White Paper launched by the honourable Prime Minister recently. Of course, we will ensure that the private sector is comprehensively consulted, we feel that the private sector needs to be at the centre of any of these initiatives.

Looking at, not only the current economic architecture, Sir, but also when those industries that are very successful for us at the moment but also looking at new industries. There is a question on medicinal cannabis coming up so soon, probably answer it in the next session, but these are the types of things that are happening and, of course, as expected need to account for the relevant laws and regulations and particularly international agreements that we need to look at.

Also, Sir, for example, we have had a bit of a brief discussion on PACER, so hopefully that

will come through in the next trade policy. There is the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (IEPA) which we have just initialled for execution, so how does that translate into the trade policy, and also looking at some of the other trading destinations?

I think we all agree that we have not really looked at Southeast Asia in any close detail. Southeast Asia, Sir, has 750 million humans or souls. It is a large market there, and of course, we would have all noticed that the UAE and Saudi are starting to look at the Pacific. These are some of the things that we will probably have to look at in terms of the policy.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, this Parliament is now aware of, that will continue to be part of the policy and how do we use that to maximise our opportunities. It is always important that in these policies we ensure that inclusivity is factored in - to the youth, women, civil society, and ensuring that resourcing requirements are identified as well to ensure that the policy is well articulated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the plan is to table the policy next year at some point once it is ready for tabulation. We have a whole year next year, but it should be in my view, quite an exciting document given the type of things we are seeing emerge in our economy and it certainly augurs well for how we try and continue to ensure that we diversify the Fijian economy and also attract investment as well to our shores.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, a question to the honourable Minister; in light of the fact that this is going to be our guiding document, with respect to any trade agreements and all the ones that you have spelt out now, what kind of assistance are we actually getting with respect to the diagnostic work that needs to be done in order to get us to where we want to in terms of a new trade policy framework? The last time we had engaged with Hub and Spokes (H&S) out of the Commonwealth, there were some other people that were engaged to do the diagnostic works. Are we going to engage, or do we have our own people doing our own diagnostic work on it?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA. - Thank you, honourable Koya, for the question. As I had mentioned in the answer, we are leveraging off Australia. As you know, there is a certain expert out of New Zealand that we use quite regularly as well, and he is probably going to be part of that exercise.

One of the good things about our trade team is that we are quite experienced, there has not really been any significant movement in that team for the last, probably eight years, I think, for those that have left Fiji. There is a lot of knowledge retention, at the moment, within the trade team, and so that will come to the fore when we develop the policy and we overlay that with the assistance that we generally get from some of our consultants that we use quite regularly; and together with Australia, I am sure we will have that adequately covered.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka!*

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, I have a question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister on South East Asia. This is something that probably has fallen off the rail. I asked with your investment team when we came to touch on the budget.

There has been some discussions with China about agriculture and fisheries products, apart from what we are going into China, and you will know the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and we are a middle-income country, we are no longer a Least Developed Country (LDC) but huge opportunity, we have already sent *dalo* to China. They love our *dalo* and they use it for so many things. The problem is when it lands. We are pleading with China as a big brother, give us something,

apart from the WTO regulations. Is that something that we are going to pick up again and please check with the team?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Thank you, honourable Leader of Opposition, he does make a good point. There are some non-tariff barriers that we have to contend with when we deal with China. So, it is a work in progress, we actually have a team in China at the Trade Consulate, that specifically tries to handhold when companies come through to get approvals. It is something that we continue to work on. That rule applies to everyone.

You will notice that the honourable Prime Minister had signed an MOU with China recently. That will hopefully create some positive movement in our direction and certainly the level of engagement that the honourable Prime Minister had, he met the top three in China when he was there. These things will hopefully translate into some more favourable disposition when it comes to China.

I agree China is a major market potential for us, we only need to get 1 percent of their population, and we will be very happy. I know the honourable Minister for Agriculture is doing quite a bit of work with a few Chinese farmers already in the country. One, his doing *noni*; that we feel is quite a big opportunity and there are some other opportunities that the honourable Minister for Agriculture is working on, more vegetable production for export to China. So, these are some of the things that are being worked on.

Kava, we feel, is an opportunity as well. At the moment, there is kava sent to China for production as well, so these are some of the things. Then, of course, you have got cosmetic care products, even Fiji Bitter, Fiji Rum, these are some products that have some traction in China, and we are continuing to work on those but, yes, I agree. Regarding China, it is a big opportunity so when I talk about Southeast Asia, that involves China as well.

Establishment of a Cancer Treatment Hospital  
(Question No. 256/2024)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable the Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament if the Government has any plans to establish a cancer treatment hospital in Fiji to address the surge in cancer patients?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, yes, he is correct that there is a surge in cancer diagnosis. It is being increasingly noted here in Fiji and it spares not any particular section within the population, it affects both adults/children, male/female, high/low socio-economic status. Cancer is also amongst the leading cause of NCDs causing illness and mortality as well.

In terms of the current management we have at the moment, it extends from prevention right up to the avoidance of the risk factors - vaccination, early diagnosis treatment, medicine, surgical procedures and radiation therapy, rehabilitation, and that includes chronic pain management. Most treatment modalities that I have mentioned are available at our primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities around the country. However, radiotherapy treatment is still not available in the country, and for that, someone to be seeking radiotherapy treatment will have to be referred overseas.

As per your question, are there any plans to establish a specific cancer treatment hospital *per se*? At the moment, no, because most of the treatment modalities are incorporated in the various settings that I have mentioned. But nevertheless, our Public-Private Partnership (PPP) with Aspen under Government and Health Care Fiji Limited for Lautoka and Ba Hospitals, they were supposed

to provide radiotherapy services at the tertiary hospitals in Lautoka Hospital in the future.

Again, establishing a radiotherapy centre is a fairly costly exercise, that is why through the PPP arrangements that I mentioned that Lautoka and Ba Hospitals were supposed to establish a radiotherapy centre, but it does not move away with what the current treatment modalities are. Nevertheless, not only cancer therapy, but we are also anticipating construction soon of a heart and kidney treatment that will be coming under the Super Speciality Hospital.

For now, in addition to the treatment modalities, the Ministry is working with Lautoka Hospital and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) towards a Radiotherapy Treatment Centre project at Lautoka Hospital that I have mentioned. Also, work is currently undertaken for the multisectoral team to review the Radiation Health Act 2009 to be able to allow the introduction of radiotherapy services in Fiji. That is the pre-requisite in order to have the radiotherapy services in Fiji that our legislation has to align with international standards before. We are doing that as we speak.

Before I sit, I wish to remind everyone, as honourable Ketan Lal has mentioned, this month is breast cancer awareness month. As Members of this august Parliament, I wish everyone if they can take the opportunity to advocate for cancer awareness in terms of advocating for screening and treatment and asking people to come on board and have a screening to be identified for treatment, if need be.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, honourable Minister for the answer to the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of radiotherapy, I believe they all have to go abroad to get it. There are some with insurance or are financially capable of going there. What about people who cannot afford insurance or are not financially stable? What kind of assistance are there for these kind of patients to go up and get treated?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has a budgeted allocation on overseas referral. Should a patient be referred by their doctor or specialist for radiotherapy treatment and they cannot afford, then they can always contact the Ministry, and if they are eligible for the overseas referral abroad.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the biggest costs when it comes to cancer treatment is chemotherapy. Recently, Solomon Islands has actually signed an MOU with Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) from India. If people travel from Fiji to India, they are given IP standard medication and if we compare the cost of IP medication – cytotoxic, that are actually available in Australia and New Zealand, it might be ten-folds more. What you can obtain for \$20 in India, would be \$200 out of Australia. Are there any plans to have selective categories of medications such as cytotoxic, antiretrovirals to allow IP standard to be brought into Fiji so that we can reduce the cost of chemotherapy and antiretrovirals for viral protection such as AIDS, et cetera? Are there any plans with the Ministry of Health because that will significantly reduce the cost?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of IP, that is something that the Ministry is looking into. I am sure you are aware that when you were in India, our team from the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS) was also there. They went and did some research on equipment and medication and had a brief idea of the Indian Pharmacopoeia.

You are correct in terms of the Indian Pharmacopoeia and the medications for chemotherapy and ARV. The Ministry, through their return from India, have briefed the Ministry on a way forward on identifying certain groups of medications that you have rightly mentioned. Upon the return of the



team, they had briefed me and said, “yes, we can look into IP”, ensuring that while we try to maintain our standards, we can still adopt the IP system in India.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in light of the fact that we know that there is a surge in cancer patients, are we currently doing the research to find out why there is a surge? And it is twofold, Sir, if there is a surge and we know the reasons why in terms of getting a new hospital specifically for cancer patients, will it incorporate doing research at the hospital?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, in terms of the research component of why there is a rise or surge in cancer cases within Fiji, that is something, I believe, not only as a Ministry but together with our local tertiary institutions are looking into and which also our development partners are assisting us in.

Nevertheless, I can say that most are under Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) and in terms of the cancer that are currently on the rise here in Fiji it has to do with infections and lifestyle. That is a proven fact and also that is why, as the research continues, we are also making sure that we strengthen the primary healthcare space - the preventative part of it.

We all know the causes, that has been clearly identified and I suggest putting out the word that prevention is still better than cure, and at the same time, continuing with the research data from our own local tertiary institutions and overseas as well.

National Exams - Re-Introduction of Scaling  
(Question No. 257/2024)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the re-introduction of scaling in the National Examination Process?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to inform Parliament that the process of the re-introduction of scaling has just been given the approval from Cabinet. Public consultation will be undertaken in terms of the re-introduction of scaling of the national examination.

However, I would like to share with us this morning the rationale in terms of the reasoning behind the need to re-introduce the scaling system in the national examination system. We tend to raise the scaling system to be introduced subject to Cabinet’s endorsement in the 2025 education year, after the completion of the consultation, policy adjustments and policy preparation at the school level to ensure the transition.

Why the introduction of the scaling system? Mr. Speaker, Sir, first is, it makes a fair representation of student performances. As it was introduced, most of us have come through the scaling system before it was disbanded in 2015. It helps normalise examination scores to account for varying degrees of difficulty across subjects and exams.

Secondly, it addresses disparities. If you see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the schools that are in the rural and maritime areas, they seem to have lessened in terms of number of schools because they tend to migrate towards the schools in towns and cities, thinking the school system here would provide them better opportunities. That is the reason why we are trying to re-introduce the scaling system.

Alignment with international standards, many countries use a form of scaling in their national

examination system to ensure consistency and fairness. Therefore, by re-introducing the scaling system in Fiji, it is in alignment with international best practices in students' assessment, ensuring that students results are credible and comparable at the global level.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have just been given the approval to conduct the public consultation exercise and hopefully we will capture all the information that is shared in the consultation process to be taken into consideration once it is re-introduced.

### Written Question

Data on School Dropouts – 2019-2023  
(Question No. 258/2024)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

There are circumstances due to which some children are compelled to drop out of school. Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the following:

- (a) what is the Ministry doing to identify these students and how is the Ministry planning to assist these children;
- (b) how many students dropped out in the last 5 years (2019 to 2023) before completing primary education; and
- (c) how many students dropped out in the last 5 years (2019 to 2023) before completing Year 10?

<sup>1</sup> HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I table my response in accordance with the Standing Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, take note that there will be four Bills today. One will be moved under Standing Orders 51, two will be for debate, vote and enactment and one for first reading.

### **ACCESS TO BUSINESS FUNDING BILL 2024**

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Access to Business Funding Bill 2024 (Bill No. 18/2024), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at the next sitting of Parliament upon presentation of the Report on the Bill by the Standing Committee; and
- (e) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament at the next sitting of Parliament, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 258/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister Education under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would have heard me in this House talks about developing comprehensive ecosystem for micro, small and medium enterprises in Fiji. This Bill is another step in that direction. Be assured, Sir, and honourable Members of this august House that we are not taking the use of Standing Order 51 lightly.

We are recommending its use in this exceptional case due to the following reasons. We have had several nationwide consultations which was conducted from 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2024 to 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2024, and we have received overwhelming support from the public and the MSMEs to expedite this Bill.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We are addressing something that your government never addressed - access to finance. You should be ashamed.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that access to finance remains the biggest challenge for businesses, particularly MSMEs and as I have said, that side of the House did nothing. They were sleeping on the job.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Microwaving.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The Bill aims to bridge the gap and unlock private sector investment into businesses in a systematic and secure manner. The Bill has been drafted by legal experts from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and vetted by the Office of the Solicitor-General. This is also a joint reform output of the ADB and the World Bank Policy action items that unlocks budgetary support, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am told this important Bill (wait for it) has been stalling the last seven years.

We have brought this into the august House in August after a year of its inception. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the nation, particularly the MSMEs of our country and aspiring entrepreneurs, are eagerly awaiting this Bill and I have to say, deserve this Bill. We are not saying for us to expedite and pass the Bill within the same week, or the same day but like that side of the House, Sir, we are saying, bring it at the next Parliament session for debate. That gives the Committee approximately six to eight weeks to conduct their work and review the Bill.

As usual, Sir, the Ministry offers any support required to the Committee to help them in their work, analysing the Bill and, of course, should they require to conduct their own consultations.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the mover. This is to do with Standing Order 51.

You have to try and catch my attention, make me look towards you and then understand that you want to ask a question, you want to stand up and speak, otherwise I will just concentrate like this and when I look back, no one is standing so that is it.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ..

MR. SPEAKER.- He should be given some coaching from the front bench.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank you for the opportunity and apologise for not catching your eye earlier, Sir, I was looking at the Deputy Prime Minister.

(Laughter)

I appreciate the purpose of the Bill to do something about financing for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). I think it is critical, it is a move in the same direction.

The point I wanted to make, Sir, when you talked about the consultations; extensive consultations have been done by bureaucrats with people in Fiji, consultation in this House is by the representative of people. That is why we always need adequate time, that is the point. We do not have any argument with the purpose of the Bill. So, when you say, “oh, we have already done this consultation.” *Me cava*, is that enough?

Consultation here is by the representatives of people. You need to make sure of that - consult well, give us enough time so we can deliberate. That is the main purpose of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is all I want to say.

I am glad that they are doing Standing Order 51. They are finally beginning to see the light, they are beginning to change because before, when they were on this side of the House, they were so anti-Standing Order 51 and now they are doing it. People used to say, “you are a hypocrite.” No, we were not hypocrites, we never argued against it. The people sitting next to them were the ones who argued, and the people sitting in front of them. That is the point I wanted to make, Sir. Consultation is required by the representatives of people and that is who we are in this Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think we have been given ample time here. It is not like the straight Standing Order 51 that we used to encounter. But now it is Standing Order 51, and it is being referred to the Committee.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- My contribution is probably about 60 seconds, Sir. I am very happy that this is now on the floor of Parliament, and it is actually going to the Committee to get done. I just wanted to correct, the honourable Minister, Sir. He said it was seven years in the making, but guess what? Seven years in the making started by us.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I really do not have much to say other than the MSMEs and the young men and women entrepreneurs of this country deserve this. We have tried to be both, pragmatic but also expedient, and that is why we approached it the way we have approached it.

As you have correctly pointed out, Sir, we are not using Standing Order 51, like the other side of the House used to, like instant coffee making legislation - tabled in one day and legislate law the next day. As we have said, this side of the House is doing things differently and actually elevating the standards of law making in our country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Access to Business Funding Bill 2024 (Bill No. 18/2024) moved under Standing Order 51 is committed to the Standing Committee for Economic Affairs and to report back to Parliament at its next sitting.]

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we proceed to the next two Bills, I remind honourable Members, that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2024 and Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2024, the debate on the next two Bills will be limited to one hour only.

### **ANTI-DOPING BILL 2024**

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, I move:

That the Anti-Doping Bill 2024 (Bill No. 1/2024) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Minister's, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public joining in through virtual platform.

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to speak on the Anti-Doping Bill 2024, a significant legislative step aimed at safeguarding the integrity of sports in our nation. This Bill, first introduced in May 2024, represents our continued commitment to ensuring clean competition, fairness and the wellbeing of our athletes.

Mr. Speaker, the world of sports is ever evolving, and so are the methods used by those who seek to gain an unfair advantage through doping. It is our duty to ensure that our athletes compete on a level playing field, free from the influence of performance-enhancing drugs. The National Anti-Doping Bill seeks to address this issue by aligning our laws with international standards, particularly those set forth by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you are aware, this Bill was initially given until August 2024 by WADA to be finalised with clear indication that penalties for non-compliance would follow. However, due to the positive developments that have taken place over the past few months during the review process, we have been granted some grace period to ensure that this Bill is passed. This extension reflects the progress we have made, but also underscores the critical importance of passing this Bill at the soonest to establish Fiji's compliance at the international doping standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill has gone through a rigorous review process, and we have ensured that it is both comprehensive and practical for our national context. It includes provisions for the establishment of a National Anti-Doping Agency, robust testing protocols, education programmes and strict penalties for violations. It is focused not only on detection and enforcement, but also on prevention and education to foster a culture of clean sport.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I speak on the Bill today, I am confident that it addresses the necessary legal, procedural and operational aspects required for an effective and antidoping framework. The Anti-Doping Bill, which we are proposing is a pivotal step towards strengthening our nation's anti-doping efforts. This Bill seeks to consolidate and enhance our existing legislative framework to effectively combat doping practices in sports. By aligning with international standards set forth by organisations like WADA, we demonstrate our commitment to being at the forefront of the global fight against doping. This is an unprecedented development not only for Fiji, but for the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, without a central and specialised organisation to support law enforcement and regulatory agencies in Fiji, the sports sector will remain vulnerable to the use of performance enhancing drugs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Standing Committee, line

Ministries, stakeholders, and international partners like WADA and staff of my Ministry who have contributed to the development of this Bill. Their invaluable input and effort has helped shape a piece of legislation that is both progressive and in the best interest of our athletes and the sporting community. As the Minister for Youth and Sports, I am deeply proud of the progress we have made, and I can only praise God for the work carried out over the past months, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to protecting the integrity of Fijian sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we look ahead to the future of sports in Fiji, it is vital that we create an environment where integrity and fair play are at the forefront. This Bill is not just about enforcement, it is about protecting the spirit of sports, promoting the health of athletes, and ensuring that Fiji continues to participate in the global sporting arena with the highest ethical standards. To that end, your support for this Bill is crucial. It not only reflects our commitment to the values of fair play, but also ensures that Fiji remains in good standing with WADA and the global sporting community. Failure to pass this Bill could lead to penalties, which would damage our reputation and the opportunities available to our athletes on the international stage.

Mr. Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament, I urge all of you to support this Bill once again, as it represents a critical step in maintaining the dignity and reputation of our athletes and sporting institutions. Let us pull together to pass this legislation and build a future where sports in Fiji continue to thrive in the spirit of fairness and excellence.

MR. SPEAKER. – Honourable Members, the vote is now in motion, and I have been given a list of speakers by the honourable Whips, as follows:

- (1) Honourable P.K. Bala;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources;
- (3) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (5) Honourable P.D. Kumar;
- (6) Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; and
- (7) Honourable V. Naupoto.

Honourable Members, the debate will be limited to one hour only, even though there are more than eight speakers here and the Secretary-General will pass the timing note. Speaking times will be limited to five minutes each.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the initiative behind and fully understand the need and reasons for the Anti-Doping Bill. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill in its current form is undeveloped and raw and seems like it has been drafted in some hurry. I do not know why, but the Bill and the proposed body to look after it, does not seem to have a clear pathway to the try line.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addressing the Anti-Doping Bill 2024, it is crucial to highlight the lack of attention given to the wider issues affecting player welfare and sports integrity in Fiji. The Government's single focus on doping neglects the broader needs of our athletes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the sports systems leaving a significant gap in sports governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Sports Integrity Commission is essential to ensure fairness, transparency and the well-being of athletes across all sports, that is, rugby, soccer, netball, athletics and more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the player welfare, our athletes are more than just competitors. They are human beings who deserve protection and support. On integrity, corruption, match-fixing and doping are merely symptoms of a broader crises on sports governance. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current Bill's focus is too narrow as it only deals with doping while ignoring the other elements of the sports corruption.

On the protection of women and girls, one of the most neglected aspects in the current framework is the safeguarding of women and girls in sports. Fiji's sports eco-system must include measures to prevent harassment and abuse, ensuring that the women can safely report incidents of misconduct through anonymous channels. The absence of any such protection in this Bill is unacceptable. We must empower women and girls to participate in sports with dignity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are we still on anti-doping?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have moved onto women and everything.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, no, it is related to that.

MR. SPEAKER.- No, no!

HON. P.K. BALA.- I have got five minutes let me finish, please.

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, confine your speech to anti-doping.

HON. P.K. BALA.- On gender and imbalance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not just about safeguarding, it is also about representation. Women are under-represented in coaching in....

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bala, I will not allow you to continue with that diatribe because you need to confine yourself to the issue here, it is anti-doping.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is at a pivotal moment in sports governance. We cannot afford to miss the opportunity to create a transparent, accountable and athlete-friendly framework. The Bill, as it stands, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is too narrow, as I have said earlier on, too incomplete and too indifferent to the real needs of our athletes. It is not just ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- This is Anti-Doping Bill?

HON. P.K. BALA.- I am talking about the Bill. What else do you want? You better have a look at the Bill then you will know. It is not just about catching our athletes.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me finish by saying that the Bill must be revised, expanded and refocussed to address the real challenges facing Fijian sports today. The creation of the Sport Integrity Commission is the solution that will not only protect at least but also restore the trust in our sports institution.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament, my contribution to the Bill today would be confined to two matters. I am sure that all the others would have a toothpick on the Bill itself. I want to speak on what the Anti-Doping Bill would do apart from it becoming an addition to the laws of our country.

The Anti-Doping Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is part of Fiji's global commitment to fairplay, good sportsmanship and the promotion of health and equality for all of our athletes. We live in a very era and age today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an example I am sure that most of our older Members of Parliament would have played rugby in an era where they were graded in either the bantam, midjets and senior grades, so that is by weight. And most when they entered into the secondary school would remain a midjet or bantam right up until they left high school. They do not grow in size *ia sa sui dromo tikoga na tamata*. They find that is not really a fair way in which sports is going to be administered. Then the age grouping was seen as a more fairer away of administering sports in our schools.

In athletics, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for example, age groups were even adjusted to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to compete, and everyone also has an opportunity to win the prize at the end of the competition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beyond the age grouping step, we traditionally know in our schools, and I am contextualising this Bill in the way we understand sports development here in our country. It is all open competition, and this is where the Anti-Doping Bill, I suppose, fits into the picture. This is where athletes in an open environment may consider taking advanced enhancing drugs so that it gives them an advantage over and above their peers in the competition.

Who would forget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the famous race, the 100 metres in Seoul in 1988 where the champion Carl Lewis was beaten on the tracks by the Canadian, Ben Johnson. We all know the story, Sir. Ben Johnson lost his medal, stripped off his medal and was also banned for some time. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it was said in that race alone in Seoul that six out of the eight finalists all tested positive for banned substance. It was highlighted, it was said to be the most dirtiest race in the history of the Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the reason why these laws are important in today's context, and I do not understand why honourable Bala was going on about that this was not a complete law, it needs some more time to be to be rehashed. I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we probably need some anti-doping laws amongst ourselves here in this House.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I was the one who started that, I know everything.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- The Anti-Doping Bill, if we do not pass it in the House today, (I thought this was going to be a bi-partisan Bill for both sides of the House) we are going to lose a lot as a country in an era and in a region where there is increasing competition for venues where these competitions were going to be held, Fiji stands to lose quite a lot if we do not pass this Bill.

We are making a bid for the SPG. We are making a bid for other international meets and without operationalising these laws and ensuring that these regulations are in place to provide for the operationalising of these laws, we will lose these competitions. If we lose these competitions, we are going to lose our recognition, we are also going to lose our standing as a central place in the Pacific where we can get all of these competitions into. I support the Bill.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a Bill that both sides of the House realised that it needs to be done, especially because we have sporting bodies that take part in international activities, talking about rugby, athletics, football and weightlifting, et cetera. The importance of it is recognised, but what must happen (and I will point something out shortly) is we cannot do this if there are something deficient in the current Bill in its form. I raised this whilst I was sitting on the Committee, it is something that obviously needs to be looked at or maybe even thought about or quickly re-drafted and I specifically talk about.



First of all, let me just say, Sir, this entire thing depends on three things. There is a code, convention and WADA. These are the things that we have made commitments to, and it is important that we get this Bill done so that we are compliant in terms of all our activities locally, and also in order to protect our local sportsmen and women, because using sports enhancing drugs has become big business. I just hope one day that they do not decide to list *warusi* on it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most important parts of the Bill is with respect to the functions of the Drug Free Sport Fiji which is the institution that has been established in this particular Bill that will take of our drug testing activities, et cetera. The worrying part for me and I still have some reservations on it is section 5(f), and I quote:

“The functions of DFSF are to coordinate with the Fiji Police Force, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), local sports entities and other anti-doping organisations to investigate complaints on doping sports in Fiji.”

The Police Force has very wide powers. If you fall foul of doping, it is not a criminal offence. And revenue and customs, so how far do they go in terms of their investigative work? Do we need to curtail it, or do we seriously need to have the Police Force and FRCS on board with respect to investigative work that is going to be done, if you have taken drugs to enhance your sporting needs. As I have said, it is not a criminal activity, it is not something that you will be criminally charged with.

You will be banned for life or whatever but there are things in there that are very positive, and I think by looking at this particular provision, and if the Office of the Attorney-General wants to quickly see whether it can be amended, or do we really need to engage the police because they have very vast powers within their laws. You cannot have someone who has tested positive for a particular drug and the police comes traipsing through his house on a search warrant, et cetera.

The powers are different, this is not an offence that has been created under the criminal law act. It is actually something that is dealt with by DFSF within the powers that is given to him. Otherwise, as I have said earlier, DFSF is actually to permitted out to carry out anti-doping testing of athletes. It is something also that we need to seriously look at into how it will operate with respect to our Coca-Cola Games, et cetera that has happened, whether that has been used at that particular level too, and this will facilitate all of that.

It is a good thing, Sir, it is a great thing to keep us compliant with respect to everything we do in our sports in Fiji and worldwide, and it keeps us, and I know for a fact, I heard the honourable Minister for Sports has spoken about this too, Sir, that if we do not do this, we may get told that we cannot partake in a particular activity offshore. So, it is important that we get it done, I know the Committee has done some tremendous work on it. The only reservation is the one that I have actually pointed out, Mr. Speaker. I thank you, Sir, for allowing me to contribute.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka.*

HON. M. S. N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Anti-Doping Bill which in some respect is a historic Bill in terms of sports in Fiji. I would like to congratulate the honourable Minister for Youth for initiating this Bill very quickly and bringing it to Parliament.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Former Minister had initiated it.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Just that I would respond very quickly to the previous speakers from the other side, Sir, and there was a suggestion that it was a bad Bill. Sir, WADA actually assisted in the drafting of the Bill. They are the foremost experts, Sir, when it comes to anti-doping so any suggestion that it is a bad bill is questionable.

The second one was, I did have a conversation with the honourable Koya regarding the concern about the police and I had a think and I was reading the clause again. It talks about this coordination with the Fiji Police, FRCS, sporting entities and other anti-doping organisations. So it is fairly, what is the word for it, not a a must report to police immediately kind of thing. It is at the discretion of the anti-doping authority, should they wish to consult the police. There can be possibly criminal action involved, like for example, someone is deliberately manufacturing anti-doping illegal substances and providing it knowingly and making money or something, so there may be some criminal element and may require the police, but I saw it as more distant option there available to the anti-doping agency, Sir.

With regard to the Bill itself, firstly I think Fiji has become a victim of its own success. Successive golds in the Olympics followed by the silver this year has created a bit more focus on Fiji. And of course, the need to actually do something to ensure that as we compete and as we continue to dominate the Seven's that we appear to be doing the right thing in terms of ethical behaviour when it comes to sports. However, I thought I just attack this from more an economic angle. You will recall, Sir, that when I talk about my priorities in terms of trade, the last one is about raising the standard of Fiji because if we are concerted in our effort to raising standards in our country, we will start being perceived at a different level. It is not just a little backwater in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, it is a serious player when it comes to things like sports.

And if we listen to people like Ben Ryan when he was leaving, Fiji, he said that the Fijians, some of them are super athletes in terms of what they can do. So, there is an opportunity with this Bill, Sir, to really validate some of the perceptions that we have about our athletes, we can actually then benefit more in terms of tourism. Right now, we are doing a billion plus in remittances. With these type of validations that have international connotations, it really elevates sporting, people look at sports through the athletes' eyes, look at the athletes from an international perspective and this will no doubt, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have a ripple effect into the economy as well.

Finally, Sir, the Bill is a good one. It covers, in my view, all that is required in terms of a body that needs to safeguard standards in the country regarding drug free sports. The fact that it is aligned very closely to WADA, simply means that we will be complying with the highest authority when it comes to anti-doping globally and we will ensure that sports is a profession for our young men and women, it continues to be protected, the temptation to delve into drugs will become more and more apparent as they compete more, they start earning millions, start earning \$10 million a year, some of our athletes will end up in that vein. So, I think the Bill in its current form is a satisfactory, Sir. It addresses the concerns of WADA, which is most important, as alluded to by all speakers. Of course, it sets us on sail on an economic path in terms of sports tourism. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset I want to say that this Bill is definitely needed, but not in the current form. There are too many flaws in the Bill, and I am going to highlight section by section which needs to be plugged before we pass this Bill.

I will start off with Clause 6 where it says that s that DFSF will approve any purchase, sale or lease of property and borrowing of money above a prescribed value. I understand that this body comes under a Ministry, and it is funded by the Government. Why is the Minister's consent not taken? Normally, any statutory body who wants to raise any money, the consent of the Minister is

taken. So, I can see there is a problem there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 7, it says that the Minister will appoint the Chairperson and the Vice Chairperson. Normally, in any situation, it is the Minister who appoints the Chairperson and then the Board decides the Vice Chair.

Another problem that I see is Clause 8, the language. Language says, “The Office of a member of the Board becomes vacant.” The language itself needs to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we move on to Clause 11, and the honourable Prime Minister will agree with me and the rest of you will agree me, that when it comes to the remuneration of a CEO of a statutory body, it is decided by the Higher Salaries Commission and not the Board. Here, it says it will be decided by the Board. No, it needs to be stated by Higher Salaries Commission. Go and look at all other legislations.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It does not mention Higher Salaries Commission at all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another problem that this Bill has is to do with Clause 17, where it says, “annual reports”. Submit the annual audited financial accounts to the Minister. My question is, when? Every other legislation like the Audit Bill, which we have just gone through, clearly state that within nine months, you must submit your Annual Reports and every other Bill. This Bill does not talk about it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It has no meaning. What it says is what it says.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No, no, no, it is not an interpretation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another problem in the law that I can see is it talks about audit - Audit Act 1969. It states Audit Act 1969, and we know that the Audit Act 1969 is going to be reviewed. Then it states, and I quote: “...DSFS is exempted from audit under the Act...” How can this organisation be exempted from audit? It says that the money is appropriated annually by Parliament, it is a statutory body, and any statutory body must be audited. You cannot say, ‘unless’. What is ‘unless’?

(Laughter)

It is known! It is stated! It is clear, that any statutory organisation must be audited, full stop!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another flaw in the legislation or the Bill I see is, the Minister may, following consultation with DFFS, make regulation. It should be the other way around. The other way around is that DFFS, with the approval of the Minister, will make the regulation. That means, they will consult the Minister, the Minister will take it to Cabinet, but it is about operationalising the Act. That is what it is all about.

But the biggest challenge that I find, is the way the structure is created. You have a Board; the Board can co-opt members and the Board can appoint the Advisory Committee. The advisory committee is basically doing the work of the CEO - carrying out research, and all that work. What

will the CEO do?

The CEO is clearly stated here that he or she can decide not to attend the Board meeting, can nominate his or her nominee. Normally, it does not work like that. A Board must have a CEO, and the CEO attends the meeting. Otherwise, if there is a dispute between the two, the CEO will always send a nominee. That is not how a system works, and that is my comment, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Kumar. I now offer the floor to honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak on the Bill.

As a former member of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament, our Committee members, two are still here - honourable Tuicolo and honourable Pillay, when we received submission from the Fiji Sports Council and the various sporting bodies that do report to this Standing Committee, one of the topics that usually comes up is the anti-doping issue, and the need for the Bill was very much needed back then, the last four years.

In our recommendation, we always support the calling for the Bill to be established. So, I am very grateful that today, I have a chance to speak on this, as a former member of the Standing Committee and we are finally here to say that the Bill is before us, for the adoption of the Bill and I fully agree with the motion.

I thank the honourable Minister for bringing it to Parliament and the Standing Committee members for their work on the Bill. As it is, Mr. Speaker Sir, there are a few key components of the Bill, and I will just touch on a few.

First and foremost, the Bill prioritises rigorous testing protocols. Through random testing and the use of advanced technology, we will ensure that our athletes are held accountable for their actions.

Secondly, the Anti-Doping Bill 2024 places strong emphasis on education and awareness. Sir, this Bill will not work without a strong emphasis on education and awareness, and I believe that it is incorporated into the Bill. For the Ministry of Education, through the Ministry of Health, we can ensure that this Bill goes to the wider scope of our community.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Anti-doping Bill 2024 also underscores the significance of mental health support for athletes. The pressure to perform at elite level can lead some athletes down to the path of substance abuse and we are very grateful that the legislation proposes the establishment of mental health resources that athletes can access confidentially.

By addressing the underlying issue contributing to doping, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we pave the way for a healthier and more supportive athletic environment. As it is, I support the Bill and, again, I thank the Standing Committee, and I thank the honourable Minister for bringing the Bill on board.

HON.V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a step in the right direction, in fact, I will say it is a leap in the right direction for sports in Fiji.

The Bill is the precursor to establish our own Anti-Doping Agency, DFSF it will be called. All sporting nations have their own Anti-Doping agencies, and it is good for Fiji that sends high end athletes, that go right up to the Olympics, and just imagine for a while when our athletes go to the Olympics, they get a gold medal for example, our flag is raised, our anthem is sung and then later

on, they get disqualified. Their medal is taken away from them because they failed their doping tests.

This agency that will be established, will protect our athletes to make sure that when they go up there to represent Fiji at the highest level, that they are clean, and they play fairly. I support the Bill; this is good and the right step at this time in Fiji.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my comments on the Bill that is before Parliament, the Anti-Doping Bill 2024. The Bill in its current form is perfect and it has gone through the whole process of Standing Committee deliberation.

The points raised now by the honourable Opposition Members should have been raised by the Standing Committee member which is from the G16-Bloc, and also the report for this particular Bill has been signed too by the honourable Usamate, we are members of the Standing Committee together.

We went through the deliberations of the Bill and what the honourable Praveen Bala had mentioned when he was Minister for Sports, he had initiated, that particular Bill. That was draft one, after a few executive consultations, the Bill was developed to draft two.

After consultation with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), it was developed to draft three, and it went back to the Ministry for draft four. After draft four, it was then taken to Cabinet, and was passed by Cabinet and the honourable Minister for Sports then tabled it to the Parliament back when the was Bill was first tabled through Standing Orders. That was draft number four.

Draft number four is what the Standing Committee had worked with, calling public consultations through media and moving around all areas in Fiji. We also called upon the Members of Parliament to present their views. It was unfortunate that none of the Members that have shared their views now, did not appear before the Standing Committee or made use of that call, even not making a written submission. Even the online platform was available there. That is the process.

So, when we sat after the consultation with the comments, we sent it back to the Ministry. We called the Ministry in a roundtable meeting with all sporting bodies around Fiji and they all supported the current form of the Bill then. Then after taking on board their comments, we sent it back to WADA for their comments when the Standing Committee was developing the form of the Bill after the consultation. Then WADA gave their comments and also it provide justification, after that then we send it back to the drafters at the Solicitor-General's Office, who then made the final drafting of the Bill, which is before us, considering WADA's requirements, international standards plus the views of the people throughout the consultation and other views that came in presented to the Standing Committee.

That is the process that was followed and the drafting that was made, and I will agree with the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications on Clause 5(f). When honourable Koya was in the Standing Committee he had raised it, we had taken that on board, and we had sent his comments to WADA.

On the interpretation he has shared in the Parliament and WADA gave their interpretation and justification, they were satisfied, the interpretations is what you have alluded to. It is more towards trying to cut down on those that are manufacturing drugs and the sources of drugs that will be used by athletes. These are some of the interpretations that the Standing Committee took on board.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the Bill that is before the Parliament, and it has gone through extensive consultations and deliberations with WADA. WADA wanted some of the clauses to be consistent with their standards and their codes, so we had to take that on board to be compliant with international standards. I have no further things to say, but for us to support the Bill. I also call upon the G16-Bloc to support the Bill, given a Member of their group is also in the Standing Committee that had already endorsed this particular Bill.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as already mentioned, today is very historical and the Bill itself is historical. On that note, I thank all those who have contributed to the formulation of the Bill. I thank the Chairman, all the honourable Members of the Standing Committee, Members of Parliament who have participated in the formulation of the Bill, and our sporting bodies in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a small island nation in the Pacific, Fiji has been promoted to Tier 2 level. Thus, the need that we have the Anti-Doping Bill in place. The Bill may not be perfect to our context, but it is a requirement when we want to compete at the international level. I have nothing further to add, but to thank everyone who have contributed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast

Ayes - 32

Noes - 2

Not Voted - 10

Motion agreed to.

[Anti-Doping Bill 2024 (Bill No. 1 of 2024), passed and enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. .... of 2024)]

### **NATIONAL DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT BILL 2024**

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2024, I move:

That the National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament; at the outset, I would like to acknowledge the commendable work done by the Chairperson and Members of the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights.

The National Disaster Risk Management Bill, as you see today, is a manifestation of the thorough consultation and verification process. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part one, of the Bill provides the short title and outlines when the Bill will come into effect. It also includes the interpretation of key terms used throughout the legislation, ensuring clarity and consistency.

Additionally, the application section defines the scope of the Bill specifying where and how

the provisions apply. Most importantly, this part establishes the objectives of the Bill which aims to enhance Fiji's preparedness, resilience and response to disasters.

It also sets out the guiding principles that will underpin our disaster risk management efforts, ensuring a comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable approach. With these foundational elements in place, we are equipped to move forward with a strong and effective Disaster Management Framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 2 of the Bill focuses on disaster risk governance. This Bill is designed to build a more resilient Fiji. At the heart of this framework as a National Disaster Risk Management Council, which is all the Permanent Secretaries for Government Ministries and key Government statutory bodies. The Council will serve as a central body responsible for overseeing disaster risk governance across the nation.

To complement this effort the establishment of the Disaster Risk Reduction Committee, the merger of the two committees from the previous Act would be pivotal in driving our national agenda on disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness. This Committee will lead our efforts in raising awareness, training our communities and ensuring the Disaster Risk Reduction becomes an integral part of our development planning. By enhancing our disaster preparedness, we are not just reacting to crisis, but proactively reducing the impacts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, equally important is the role of the emergency committee, which is tasked with coordinating our immediate response when disasters occur. Under the leadership of the Permanent Secretary responsible for Disaster Management, this Committee ensures a swift, efficient, well-coordinated response minimising the damage and loss often caused by disasters. Additionally, the Committee has the authority to convene and make recommendations to Cabinet in the event that National Disaster Risk Management Council is unable to convene.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 2, also defines the roles of the National Controller and National Coordinator who will have broad oversight and operational powers to lead and coordinate disaster management efforts across the country. These roles will ensure that our systems are agile and capable of adapting to any emergency that may arise.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO) will serve as a cornerstone for our Disaster Governance Framework formally known as the National Disaster Management Office. This rebranded entity reflects a strategic shift towards managing risks before they escalate into disasters. With a dedicated team and strong leadership the NDRMO will oversee the coordination of all aspects of disaster management from preparedness and planning, to response and recovery, ensuring a more proactive and efficient approach to safeguarding our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we proceed with part 2 of the Bill, I would like to highlight several key components that are vital to strengthening our Disaster Risk Management Framework. This Bill retains the Clause regarding the Disaster Service Liaison Officer from the previous legislation. This officer will play a critical role in coordinating disaster management efforts among stakeholders within the respective agencies ensuring effective communication and collaboration during times of crisis.

In addition, the establishment of the Single Window International Facilitation Team is a critical step forward. This Team will streamline and manage international assistance during disasters, ensuring that legal and logistical challenges are addressed, and that aid can be received and distributed efficiently. By formalising this process, we guarantee that international support is swiftly mobilised when needed.

The establishment of the Fiji Cluster System will further enhance our disaster management capacity by coordinating sector specific responses. This System encourages collaboration across various sectors such as Health and Nutrition, Education and Communications, ensuring a cohesive and integrated approach to disaster response.

The Bill also provides for the registration and regulation of humanitarian actors and disaster risk management volunteers. These actors will be recognised through a formal registry and clear standards will be established to ensure accountability and effectiveness roles in their contributions.

This structure also allows for the deregistration of actors or volunteer organisations that fail to meet the required standards thereby maintaining the integrity of our disaster response efforts. The Bill introduces a system for eligible actors with a formal registry that ensures all entities contributing to disaster risk management are properly recognised and regulated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we advance to Part 3 of this significant Bill, I would like to highlight the provisions concerning the sub-national administration. This section elevated from the 1995 National Disaster Management Plan, establishes the Divisional Disaster Risk Management Office as a vital entity in our efforts to address disaster risks at the Divisional level. The functions of the Divisional Disaster Risk Management Office are clearly defined, ensuring that each Division is equipped with the necessary leadership to implement effective disaster risk management strategies tailored to the specific needs and circumstances.

Furthermore, the establishment of Disaster Risk Management Committees recognises membership at provincial and district levels, municipal level and community level. The National Coordinator, in consultation with the responsible Divisional Commissioner is tasked with establishing these committees at the following levels provincial and state levels, municipal level in consultation with the responsible Special Administrator or Mayor, community level in collaboration the responsible Turaga ni Koro or District Advisory Council. The membership of these sub-national Disaster Risk Management Committees is clearly defined in the respective schedules. Schedule 5 outlines members for Provincial and District Levels. Schedule 6 details members for municipal levels and schedule seven specifies members for community levels.

The structured approach, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ensures that the Disaster Risk Management is effectively addressed at every level of our society, fostering a coordinated and proactive response to potential disasters.

As we proceed to part 4 of the Bill, I would like to emphasise the financial arrangements that are crucial for our disaster risk management efforts, this part outlines the provisions for the budget dedicated to disaster risk management, ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to support our initiatives and response strategies.

Part 5, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we establish the Disaster Risk Management Fund. This fund is designed to provide the necessary financial support for disaster preparedness and response activities, including loss and damage. The purpose the fund, along with its application processes, procurement guidelines and the requirements for accounting audits are clearly defined to ensure transparency and accountability.

Additionally, the fund will be subject to an annual report, and we have included provisions for income tax exemption to encourage contributions and investments in our disaster risk management efforts.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 6, which focuses on disaster risk reduction. This section includes the establishment of a multiple hazard warning system, ensuring that there will be effective mechanisms in place to provide timely warnings to our communities. The responsibilities of the various agencies involved in issuing warnings, arrangement of this warning and the communication systems that will be utilised are all outlined in this part. Furthermore, Sir, we also address the need for evacuation centres, recognising the critical roles in ensuring the safety and well-being of our citizens during emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 7 focuses on disaster risk management plans. This section introduces the National Disaster Risk Management Plan detailing its contents and the process for regular reviews to ensure its effectiveness. It also mandates the creation of Divisional Provincial and District Disaster Risk Management Plans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 9 of the Bill, outlines the provisions regarding emergency operations. Details of the process for declaring national state of disaster including public dissemination and duration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 11 focuses on relief and early recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 12 addresses international assistance, here we outline the processes for assessing the need for international support, making requests and coordinating efforts. It clarifies the responsibilities of assisting international actors, ensuring effective collaboration with global partners during crisis.

In Part 13, it discusses international deployment, establishing a national emergency response team, tasked with mobilising resources and expertise during emergencies.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 14 of the Bill, I would like to outline the miscellaneous provisions is essential for the effective implementation of the National Disaster Risk Management Bill.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill represents a comprehensive approach to disaster risk management, equipping our nation with the tools and frameworks necessary to effectively respond to and recover from disasters. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu* and *dhanyavaad*.

MR. SPEAKER.— Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on the motion. I also have a list with me and like the other Bills that has been passed. This one here will be debated to one hour only. The Secretary-General will pass the timely note and speaking times will be limited to five minutes each.

For that we have made some changes as well and the batting will be led by the honourable Leader of the Opposition who will be speaking for 17 minutes. Then the Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection will follow, she will be speaking for seven minutes. Then it will be followed by honourable Deputy Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, who will be speaking for seven minutes. Followed by the Minister for Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services who will also speak for seven minutes, and that will round off the participation on the debate. That comes to one hour. So, the floor is yours, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first allow me to thank the honourable Members of the Opposition, including the G-9 Bloc, Sir, for allowing me to perhaps just take up the time allocated to us.

Let me congratulate the honourable Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management and his team, past and present, and partners for having worked so hard for the past years to arrive at this point where we now have the National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 being tabled in this august Parliament.

I must say, that today brings me, personally, a sense of satisfaction considering that I was a part of this journey in the efforts to review the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 and in the initial phases of the review, which has resulted in the Bill now tabled for debate. Having served us, as Divisional Disaster Coordinator, as National Disaster Controller, and as the line minister for National Disaster Management, I can attest to the need for the review of the Act.

I also need to acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister because the Act was in 1998 and, of course, the National Disaster Management Plan was also of 1995, which had his signature on those documents. But as time progressed, and given the phenomenon's that we went through, there is a need, because of the so many actors coming into the country, the overlap and the duplication in roles and of course the need for us to align as well. So that we can accommodate and facilitate our partners when they do come into the country.

One of the main purposes of the review of the Act, Sir, was to pave the way forward to overcome the overlapping roles in the administrative, boundaries and to create a stronger sense of shared responsibility within government, communities and with partners throughout the disaster management cycle for mitigation to preparedness, response and recovery. I am happy to note from my very quick browse through this Bill that most of the review objectives have been covered in the Bill.

Basically, Sir, first was *TC Pam* of 2015. We deployed, and we just utilised our experience in the Military deployment and of course have to seek Cabinet approval. We learnt a lot from Vanuatu, particularly with the arrangements that they have, together with the team and when we looked at the lessons learned, we then had *TC Winston* in 2006. We were overwhelmed and we had a lot of support, and that led to the serious discussions, not only here but regionally as well. Together with the Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, honourable Julie Bishop, we talked about the region, and we talked about Fiji as well. One is the Act and then the regional arrangements as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will make a few comments, not that they are there, but probably something that can be looked into as well for consideration.

The shift in the focus of the Act from natural disasters to multi-hazard approach marks a significant step forward in terms of development in Fiji as this brings our disaster legislation up to par with current global practices. Before it only covered natural disasters, not man-made phenomenon and that, sort of, restricts us in so many ways. If we talk about oil spill but, of course, does not involve terrorism, that is under a separate Act altogether. But we were only limited to natural disasters. Now, the multi-hazard approach, that has been addressed in the Bill and I wish to thank the honourable Minister.

The honourable Minister has talked about the national administration covered in Part 2. I just wish to comment very quickly, honourable Minister, on Division 6 - Humanitarian Actors, on the registration of all the actors and volunteers. This is very, very critical because a lot of times, after a disaster, there is a lot of funding around. And then all of a sudden, there is a group that comes in saying, "We have been in the Western Division for all these while", and we do not know where they come from. It is usually the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), but then even some do not come under the umbrella of FCOSS, particularly the Human Rights. This is why we need to have this register, Sir.

Most importantly too, Sir, on the international assistance, we have found out that with all due respect to the good work that they do and this is why we need to rest and thank you for the de-registration because sometimes when they come for containers, they come up with a list of what is coming in the container, but there is a different thing altogether in the container.

If we go now to Walu Bay, there is a Nissan patrol vehicle (SUV). It is rusting there at Walu Bay. That came in a container - outboard motor engines, brush cutters, computers - almost everything, but it was for other purposes. That is why organisations need to be registered and, of course, volunteers as well. So, this is very positive in the Bill. Probably some organisations will not agree, but I think in terms of transparency, accountability and interoperability, we need to put it together, particularly when we are answerable as well to those that do provide us with assistance and donations when it comes to our responses.

I am happy to note as well, Sir, the provisions of the Bill in Part 3, that brings clarity to the roles of the different levels of administration, from Minister to National Disaster Controller, and to the Divisional and Provisional Administration, and to the communities, and recognises the critical role that Divisional officers and community members play in disasters.

The establishment of Disaster Management Offices to support divisional operations is a positive development. And I have noted in the Bill, Sir, municipal councils are now included. Previously, it is only national government and right to the community, but municipal councils, particularly for those who are living within the town boundaries have an obligation because they collect rates from the ratepayers and they, unfortunately, do not have any emergency response plan at all.

If you go to Wellington, they have an emergency response plan. If you go to Auckland, they have an emergency response plan. Here in Fiji, perhaps, honourable Ministers, this is something that we also need, but the municipal council has to be within that. Both, in the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement, I will talk about the role of the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation and the Chamber of Commerce as well later on in the Bill because in the towns and cities, this is where majority of the people live and, particularly, in terms of the economy. This is where our DRR also needs to focus because resilient cities is a top priority under both, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement.

This is why the role of the municipal council is so important and I am glad that they are now part of that. From my first experience in Labasa when there is flood, I asked, "Where is the Lord Mayor?" They said, "He does not come to the meeting." I asked, why? They said, "No, he is not part of the it." That should change. We know what Lautoka and Nadi went through in *TC Evans* and that is why we need their participation. Of course, a lot of people use your civic facilities and your town halls for evacuation purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill establishes a single window for the facilitation team, which will coordinate and expedite the legal requirements. The only thing that I noted, honourable Minister, it does not matter, it is now headed by the team from Trade, but usually it is Foreign Affairs and, of course, Procurement Office as well in there, but can be easily coordinated regardless of who is there.

However, we need that focal point as well because national coordinator and the rest will be so busy with all other things. If we delegate these responsibilities with clear demarcation, it will really help a lot but because a lot of assistances are coming in, we need to have the single window facilitation, and I have talked about how we monitor as well. I have talked about the experience with containers and so many other things because in the end, we will always be accountable.

Lastly, Sir, past experiences called for some alignment in the work of Government, international partners and donors in the disaster management efforts. This is addressed through a system established under Part 12 of the Bill, which is extremely necessary to ensure better coordination in the disaster management,

The honourable Minister has talked about international response. When we have the systems in place, if the ADF comes in, in the planning group, in whatever, everything will gel, Sir. This is why we need this coordination, and I am thankful that that is in place.

Just a few observations, honourable Minister, that I wish to raise. On the title of the Bill, I am still concerned about 'National Disaster Risk Management'. It might take the focus on risk management rather than just the National Disaster Management Act, because risk management is part of the disaster management cycle. So, I just want to make that contribution. Although I have noted in Part 6 of the Bill that it focuses on national disaster reduction.

The other point that I wish to raise, honourable Minister, is whilst the Bill has adopted a multi-hazard approach to national disaster management, I am of the view that for purposes of clarity, the role of other agencies responsible for hazards that is put under Schedule 8 and Schedule 9, must be made clear, and should the hazards in their areas of control advance, to become national disasters.

I also wish to raise on Schedule 3, if you can consider including the Chamber of Commerce in Suva. The Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation already have their own team, and they have been part of our council, we have been inviting them in previous years. I have talked about the role that they play in disasters because they will help us a lot. When we gave containers to Tonga for the response, most of the containers were provided by them because they were part of the team already.

The donations that came were mostly from them, sponsorship, et cetera, and even releasing their employees to come and help us. That is why the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation is so important to the team.

Schedule 4 on Divisional, perhaps, if respective Town Council Chamber of Commerce can be part of that Divisional Team. That is an observation, Sir.

There has been some mention too about the Climate Change Adaptation Bill. I think when we had the Meteorological and Hydrological Services Bill 2024 that was passed here a few months ago, I did mention about these overlaps because climate change is also related to disasters, as well as with the Environmental Management Act. What is important, and the Agency should know this that, once an activity or an event becomes a hazard (hazard is defined in the Act), then it falls into the responsibility of the Disaster Management area.

May I also say here, Sir, in terms of the multi-hazard approach, I have also mentioned this previously, after COVID that was another experience, probably then we will have to get in all the other emergency frameworks because the Environmental Management Act comes under the honourable Prime Minister.

Then we had a spill from a broken sewage pipe in Nabua a few years back. There was a big chaos because they have never been activated to respond. So, everything has to be handled again. That was why we need to probably bring in the emergency responses together later on.

I also note that the Bill formalises the establishment of the cluster system. Honourable Minister, the cluster system in Part II, Division 5, only states that we are going to establish the cluster system. I am suggesting if cluster systems already established after *TC Evans* in 2012 can be put in.

We already have nine cluster systems in place.

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister is saying, “I do not know which cluster system is that”, but I am going to tell you the disaster cluster, the:

- (1) Safety and Protection Cluster;
- (2) WASH Cluster (which is on water, sanitation and hygiene);
- (3) Logistics Cluster;
- (4) Shelter Cluster;
- (5) Infrastructure Cluster;
- (6) Communications Cluster;
- (7) Health and Nutrition Cluster;
- (8) Education Cluster; and
- (9) Food Security and Livelihood Cluster.

Clusters are run together by both, government and non-government agencies. So, in terms of ownership because it will also bring commitment, it would be good to include the clusters in there.

Lastly, Sir, I think just a small one – minor, but I think it important as well. There appears to be some confusion in the terminology. People are used to our set up that was put by our colonial masters. When you talk ‘sub-national’, people are used to ‘division’ and whatever because most of the boundaries that we have too in the country that the Bureau of Statistics work on is still based on this. You would know this, Sir, as a Valuer.

With those observations, I, again, thank the honourable Minister and his team for the efforts. I wish you well in the application of the Bill and, of course, there will be opportunities for us too and we will always offer our assistance and help to contribute and, of course, the cyclone is coming up, Sir, and let us prepare well to minimise the damages and the costs.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the Bill and I wish to congratulate the honourable Minister for such a time as this that this Bill has been really overdue. I want to just shift our focus to the human faces that need to deal with disasters and how this law that is before us is gender and vulnerable groups responsive.

Now, we face unique challenges in Fiji and because of this legislation, it does need to address the unique challenges that our vulnerable groups face. Mr. Speaker, this is in line with our commitment in our National Development Plan, in strengthening the policy and legal framework for gender equality and social inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, the Act has explicitly incorporated inclusiveness provisions which concerns vulnerable groups - our women, our children, our people living with disabilities and our older persons.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing this Bill, the following are just some provisions that I would like to highlight.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, in Clause 9 of the Bill - Powers of Chairperson of the Council, Subclause (b) has specifically mentioned ‘he’ or ‘she’, whereas in the previous Act, it just mentions ‘he’. So, obviously, Mr. Speaker, this is being gender responsive and inclusive, and we thank the honourable Minister for considering this, the Standing Committee, as well as the consultations that were undertaken.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, as the Chair for the Safety and Protection Cluster, our Ministry is the Chair, I would like to acknowledge the establishment of the Fiji Cluster System in the Bill. It plays a crucial role in coordinating disaster response efforts across various sectors.

Mr. Speaker, by incorporating gender responsive and vulnerable group strategies within the cluster system, we are ensuring that there is better preparedness for response and recovery for our vulnerable groups.

Specifically, under Clause 66(2)(a) to (i), it has recognised the need for our evacuation centres to be retrofitted for the ease of access to our vulnerable groups. I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for raising the very important issue of our evacuation centres in our towns and cities where, Mr. Speaker, if do look at our informal settlements, especially with the number of people who live in informal settlements and the sizes of the halls, I do not think they will cater for such a big number as an evacuation centre. So, as we prepare to cope for our vulnerable groups especially, Mr. Speaker, this needs to be looked at.

Mr. Speaker, there is also, in reference to Part 7 - Disaster Risk Management Plans, it specifically recognises the representation of vulnerable groups to be part of the consultations in formulating the National Disaster Risk Management Plan.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important in upholding an evidence-based approach and intervention with relevant data, Part 8 of the Bill under Clause 82 has provisions in upholding data which is inclusive of vulnerable groups during a disaster. It includes requirements to collect, analyse, monitor and publish such data, to ensure that the response is inclusive and targeted.

Probably, just a point of validation, Mr. Speaker, under Clause 99(b), it mentions the *Turaga ni Koro* from the 14 Provinces, but there are also *Marama ni Koro* in the Provinces. I am sure this will be validated by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs in recognition of women's leadership and decision-making in our village settings.

Mr. Speaker, the membership in the DRR Committee is impressive, compared to the 1998 Act. It ensures that gender is mainstreamed when it comes to disaster risk management, mainly, the Director responsible for women is included in the Committee, Mr. Speaker, and we acknowledge that.

Also, under Schedule 7 (Section 50), it has provided for having representatives of women, youth and vulnerable groups. Also, in Schedule 4 (Section 47), there is specific mention also on representatives of vulnerable groups in the Municipal Disaster Risk Management Committees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, women, children and marginalised groups often bear the brunt of natural disasters. They are usually the most disproportionately affected, facing greater risks and challenges. But I do wish to, again, congratulate the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, and his Ministry Team, as well as to thank the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and honourable Members of the Committee, and the Office of the Solicitor-General, for their hard work in bringing this Bill to the House. The main objective is to ensure that our vulnerable groups are supported and assisted in times of risks and disaster, and to ensure that no one is left behind.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for explaining the Bill in detail and the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection. I think this is a very important Bill, in that, it establishes a framework to guide the preparedness and response to disaster risks, including health emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this Bill is timely because more and more, Fiji is becoming vulnerable to the speed, the frequency and the intensity of natural disasters and which, as we saw, has proven catastrophic in terms of livelihoods, damage to infrastructure, impact on public finances, the economy in general and the overall socio-economic landscape.

The Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, actually provides a framework to respond effectively to issues, such as immediate humanitarian support rehabilitation, the construction works and income support to those who get affected in a big way. The honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Minister both pointed out that the Bill actually establishes an institutional and legislative framework to deal with the number of things that are required and are done during a disaster to make it more effective. It ensures that there is a proper decision-making structure that is transparent and accountable, and clearly lays out the powers and responsibilities of respective committees and agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is similar to other legislative reforms that we had undertaken, and the proposed National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 was also part of the policy reform actions for our Joint Budget Support, like the Bill presented today by the honourable Deputy Prime and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

We want to thank all our partners, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Australia and New Zealand and European Union, because we have received a lot of support towards the Bill too.

The Ministry of Finance's initiatives in support of Disaster Risk Response is in line with international best practice and the anticipation of some of the key provisions of the Bill. The Ministry of Finance has already undertaken several new initiatives to support Disaster Risk Preparedness and Response. And let me very quickly just talk about the recently negotiated \$75 million Disaster Fund Facility with JICA. This will help us with quick disbursement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the finance has already been negotiated and approved, prior to the disaster and will be disbursed upon request from Government, once a State disaster is declared by Cabinet. Apart from the quick disbursement, this is also a very highly concessional financing facility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the JICA Standby Facility, Fiji has also taken up what we call Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option (CatDDO). These are part of the two World Bank's financing loan operations. In simple terms, what that means is that in the event of a disaster and a Declaration of State of Natural Disaster by Cabinet, Government will have access to about US40 million in immediate financing.

Apart from this, Government has also bought its first signed-off, of what we call, parametric insurance from Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company (PCRIC) and, again, the sum insured, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was around \$27 million at a premium cost of about \$2.5 million. So, this premium of \$2.5 million will get us \$27 million, if there is a natural disaster because the insurance will kick in. So, we are also looking at future development partners, to ensure that, that is also increased.

We are also setting aside a contingency budget for disaster which is directed to the Disaster Trust Fund with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). Apart from that, there are discussions with ADB on other infrastructure related to disasters, like bridges, and the Nadi River Project is the largest Climate Adaptation Project to reduce flood in that area. As I have said in Parliament the other day, we have received the Technical Report and we are on target to actually progress the project by next year, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I have another two minutes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. On the Bill itself, the financial arrangement

aspect of the Fund is clearly provisioned in Part 4 of the Bill, which is also a very good innovation. So, Clause 52, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allows the Permanent Secretary to, and I quote:

“...ensure that an allocation is provided within the Ministry’s annual budgetary estimates to finance disaster risk management, including –

- (a) disaster risk reduction, preparedness, prevention and disaster mitigation;
- (b) emergency response;
- (c) rehabilitation long-term recovery;
- (d) related activities;
- (e) running costs of NDRMO; and
- (f) running costs of disaster risk management councils, committees and technical working groups established under this Act.”

So, those provisions in the Bill will also allow us to ensure that the finance is available, and the management of finance is provided very clearly in the Act.

The last one that I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker Sir, is that in the establishment of the fund under the Act, the annual report on the activities and expenditure of the fund, including financial statements, will be reported to Cabinet and to Parliament thereafter. So, the Bill from the financial point of view, Sir, is quiet an innovation. It will ensure better transparency and accountability during times of disaster, and what we are also ensuring is that the funding is available so that we are not scrambling for funding when we are hit by a major disaster. So, apart from the budgetary allocation, we are also having this provision as a standby loan.

Honourable Usamate, Mr. Speaker, is not here, otherwise, I would have told him that we are also dealing with disasters from 2006 to 2022 on a number of fronts as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the Bill before us, and I thank the honourable Minister, especially his officers, and the NDMO Office in terms of the formulation of this Bill, the wide consultations done and the input in terms of the formulation of the Bill.

Sir, I would like to mention that within the Bill, the term ‘coordination’, as in the “coordination of multiple hazard approach and multiple hazard early warning and early action systems at the national, sub-national levels, et cetera”, is mentioned 36 times, approximately 36 times. Of course, in the Schedules, you will note that the Director Meteorological Services is a member in nearly all the Committees and that phrase is mentioned at the various levels in terms of the administration of the Act from the National Management Council, Disaster Risk Reduction Committee, Emergency Committee, National Controller and Coordinator, right up to the Sub-National Administration and Functions of the Divisional Disaster Risk Management Office. So, it emphasises the role of coordination function, as I have already mentioned, of multi-hazard approach and multi-hazard early warning early action, which is the role of the Fiji Meteorological Services.

If you recall, we had formulated and passed the Meteorological and Hydrological Act 2024 in this Parliament, which provided a legal framework which enhances the role of Meteorological Services and which is also a key critical part in terms of National Disaster Risk Management, which is why it is a key role in the Act. Some of the functions in terms of the Fiji Meteorological Services is to establish, maintain, upgrade and overlook the renewable networks for meteorological and hydrological observation and collection of meteorological and hydrological data. Again, which is critical in terms of the functioning of this Committee.



Of course, forecasting weather oceans conditions and the state of the atmosphere and routine issue of public weather forecasts. Issue impact-based forecasts that contributes to Fiji's multi-hazard early warning systems and contribute to the safety, regulatory and efficiency of air navigation between the Nadi Flight Information Region and selected airdromes in the Southwest Pacific Region, as Fiji is the regional specialised meteorological centre.

In terms of the functions of the Meteorological Services in collaboration with the National Disaster Management infrastructure and offices, some of the areas where there has been close collaboration include the recently installed community-based flood early warning systems and flood gauges in the Central Division through the current funding of the Government of Korea and New Zealand. Also, contribution to the development of Fiji's Early Warning for All (EW4ALL) Concept Note to the Green Climate Fund, strengthening of our collective response to disaster by enabling Fiji Meteorological Service staff in attending District, Divisional and Tikina Council Meetings to create awareness on weather hazards and the importance of disaster preparedness for early action.

Through the Fiji Meteorological Services, the Ministry is currently working with the Government of Japan on the construction of a state-of-the-art Meteorological and Disaster Awareness Regional Centre for the Pacific, which also houses the Regional Training Centre and Regional Instrument Centre. As we are about to enter into another tropical cyclone season, the Fiji Meteorological Service is currently retraining and upskilling operational officers to improve its operational performance with regards to the severe weather which will be coming our way. Upskilling of staff involves seconding guest lecturers and training from various Meteorological Centres of the World to work with the Meteorological and Hydrological and immediate support personnel.

I would state at this point that we have an issue with high staff turnover, so it is quite a challenge at this moment, and it is something that we will need to continually address as we move forward. Unfortunately, most are moving to regional organisations. There might be a need to relook at that, maybe to have a MOU with regional organisations so that they are given leave, but they can still come back to our national organisation.

Sir, the Bill before us will enable the Meteorological Office to work closely with the National Disaster Management Office, in addressing the needs which will evolve in changing weather conditions, which supports the development and implementation of strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change by providing a legal framework to protect our communities. Sir, I support the motion on the National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024. *Vinaka!*

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vina 'a valevu!* I now call upon the Minister to speak in reply.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have much to say but I just want to, first of all, thank everyone involved in the parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the honourable Members of the Committee, and all the hard work that you have done, staff of the Office of the Solicitor-General and all members of this august House who have participated in the consultations, as well as members of the public.

We thank our team at the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, and I specifically mention the outgoing Director for Disaster Management, Ms. Vasiti Soko, who, at the moment, we are preparing to farewell her once we return to our office. At the moment, they are all watching on TV with bated breath to see how things pens out. But we thank everyone involved, all our international partners, and we thank you for all the commitment that has been shown. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2024 (Bill No. 6 of 2024) passed and enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. .... of 2024)]

MR. SPEAKER. – Honourable members, I now call upon the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs, to take the floor.

### **BILLS – FIRST READING**

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I, first of all, want to thank you for allowing this Bill to be rescued from tomorrow's aborted order of business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill 2024, Bill No. 19 of 2024, be read a first time.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the four copies of the Bill to the Secretary-General.

[Fiji Truth and Reconciliation Commission Bill (Bill No. 19/2024) read a first time and tabled in Parliament]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, in accordance with Standing Orders 84(1), the Bill has been a read first time and the Bill will now be listed on the Order Paper and sat down for the second reading at a future seating date.

Honourable Members, until such time, the honourable Prime Minister will give notice for the second reading, I encourage all honourable Members to utilise their time to peruse the Bill and prepare for debate which will primarily focus on the principles and merits of the Bill.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

That Parliament adjourns until such date and time as will be determined in due course for a special sitting to appoint the President of the Republic of Fiji.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

The Parliament adjourned *sine die* at 7.46 p.m.

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**Reply to Written Question No. 258/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 2178)**

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**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION  
(Hon. A.M. Radrodro)**

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Reply to Question No. 258/2024 is as follows:

(a) The contributing factors to school dropouts are multifaceted. To identify these students, the Ministry is:

- (i) Using the information from our Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) to identify -
- Frequent or prolonged cases of absenteeism as recorded in FEMIS.
  - Children with learning difficulties.

Using the information from our Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) to identify -

- Frequent or prolonged cases of absenteeism as recorded in FEMIS.
- Children with learning difficulties.

Outside of the FEMIS, teachers, Child Protection Officers (CPO), Heads of Schools (HOS) would also capture in their counselling school records information such as -

- History of family difficulties - including migration, living with extended family, family violence, domestic violence, single parent families.
- Children being in contact or conflict with the law.

Additionally, schools may be collecting data from the Substance Abuse Advisory Council (SAAC) on students who need extra support and providing avenues to provide that support.

- (ii) To assist these students there is a need for collective effort of government agencies, civil society, churches, religious organisation, families and the 'vanua' in their proactive approach in assisting the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education has the following provisions:

- Heads of Schools (HOS) or their designee to visit the homes and places of abode of these 'at-risk' students.
- Provide counselling support through the counselling HUBS in the four Divisions that is maintained by professional counsellors.
- A new initiative of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) project initiative of "Vakatabu", targeting school dropouts in the village/community-based settings.
- Providing careers counselling in the communities.
- Providing alternative pathways such as TVET and micro-skills training for those who prefer a skills-based training.
- Provision of Free Education Grant to all school age children from Years 1 to 13,

- this alleviates the strain on parents.
- Provision of Special Inclusive Education Grant (SIEG) to all eligible school age children in Special Inclusive Education Schools, this alleviates the strain on parents.
- Transport assistance for eligible students.
- Back to school support at the beginning of each school year for eligible students.
- Provision of free textbooks.
- Remission of fees and boarding fees for eligible students.
- Hardship Scholarships from TSLS for economically disadvantaged tertiary students.
- Scholarships for micro qualifications training tenable at our Vocational Schools.
- Provision and access to extracurricular activities such as sports, cadets, Duke of Edinburgh. This balanced approach acknowledges that not all students are academically oriented, thus, these programmes harness the talents and interests of students in both, primary and secondary school levels.

(b)

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
802	946	924	755	1,162	4,589

A total of 4,589 students were identified in the Ministry's Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) Database as not been registered from 2019 to 2023 in our schools. Whilst the specific reasons for drop out or premature exit from the education system is not captured in neat categories in FEMIS, reasons that have been disclosed at school level include, but is not limited to:

- (i) Demise;
- (ii) Migration;
- (iii) Public school to private school movement;
- (iv) Formal employment;
- (v) Informal employment; and
- (vi) Medical condition.

(c)

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
1,503	967	1,054	985	1,217	5,726

A total of 5,726 students were identified in the Ministry's Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS) Database as not been registered from 2019 to 2023 in our schools. Whilst the specific reasons for drop out or premature exit from the education system is not captured in neat categories in FEMIS, reasons that have been disclosed at school level include, but is not limited to:

- (i) Demise;
- (ii) Migration ;
- (iii) Public school to private school movement;
- (iv) Formal employment;
- (v) Informal employment; and
- (vi) Medical condition.