



ATTORNEY-GENERAL GRAHAM LEUNG

**RESPONSE TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS ON 24
FEBRUARY 2025**

TUESDAY, 4 MARCH 2025

HON SPEAKER;

HON PRIME MINISTER;

HON DPM, CABINET MINISTERS & ASSISTANT MINISTERS;

HON LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

FELLOW CITIZENS

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT, RATU NAIQAMA LALABALAVU FOR HIS MOST GRACIOUS UPLIFTING ADDRESS WHEN HE OPENED PARLIAMENT LAST MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2025.

HIS EXCELLENCY REMINDED US OF OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY TO FOSTER A SOCIETY THAT IS JUST, EQUITABLE AND RESILIENT, AND THAT WE MUST WALK TOGETHER IN UNITY.

IN ORDER TO DO SO, I BELIEVE THAT IT IS VITAL THAT WE DEVELOP A KEEN SENSE OF MUTUALITY. OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE DEPENDS ON EACH OTHER.

IF WE ARE TO DEVELOP AND GROW AS ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE WITH ONE DESTINY, OUR STATE NEEDS TO BE INCLUSIVE.

OUR FUTURE AS A UNITED COUNTRY COMPRISING DIVERSE PARTS WILL BE ASSURED IF WE WORK TOWARDS BUILDING A GREATER SENSE OF NATIONHOOD.

WE HAVE TO MOVE BEYOND CO-EXISTENCE AND LIVING IN SILOS. WE MUST MAKE FAR GREATER EFFORTS TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING OTHERS OF DIFFERENT RACES AND FAITHS.

THE THINGS THAT UNITE US – OUR LOVE OF RUGBY, A GOOD CURRY AND THE VALUE OF KITH AND KIN, ARE FAR GREATER THAN THE THINGS THAT DIVIDE US.

GREATER SOCIAL INTERACTION AND BONDING BETWEEN OUR COMMUNITIES IS IMPORTANT. IT WILL HELP DISPEL MYTHS THAT WE HAVE ABOUT EACH OTHER, AND CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING. NO ONE RACE OR COMMUNITY IN OUR COUNTRY HAS A MONOPOLY ON VIRTUE.

OUR SENSE OF BELONGING TO PLACE AND TO EACH OTHER AS ONE PEOPLE IS UNDERDEVELOPED.

NATIONHOOD, WHERE IT ENCOMPASSES VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS, SUGGESTS A RICH CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

I AM CONFIDENT THAT DESPITE OUR CHEQUERED HISTORY, OUR RESILIENCE AND THE LARGE MEASURE OF GOODWILL THAT EXISTS WITHIN AND BETWEEN THE MAJORITY OF ORDINARY PEOPLE IN OUR NATION MEANS THAT WE ARE FULLY CAPABLE OF BRIDGING THE DIFFERENCES THAT HAVE SOMETIMES CHARACTERIZED OUR PAST.

HIS EXCELLENCY MADE A POINTED REFERENCE TO THE YOUTH OF THIS COUNTRY WHEN HE SAID:

“YOU ARE THE FUTURE OF THIS NATION. YOUR DREAMS, AMBITIONS AND HARD WORK WILL DEFINE THE DESTINY OF OUR NATION.”

IF WE ARE NOT TO REPEAT THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST, I BELIEVE THAT OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS A CRITICAL ROLE IN PREPARING OUR CHILDREN AS CITIZENS AND FUTURE LEADERS OF OUR COUNTRY,.

OUR SCHOOL CURRICULUM MUST INCULCATE CIVIC VALUES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW. THEY MUST TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF TOLERANCE, UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY SUCH AS OURS.

OUR CHILDREN MUST BE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THEIR COLLECTIVE PAST, CONSIDERATE OF EACH OTHER'S HERITAGE. AND RESPECTFUL OF OTHER'S RIGHTS AS WELL AS THEIR OWN.

MR SPEAKER, STEPPING INTO GOVERNMENT COMES WITH CHALLENGES AND A STRONG EXPECTATION TO DELIVER. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADING A NATION IS NEVER EASY, AND THE PEOPLE RIGHTFULLY LOOK TO US FOR LEADERSHIP, STABILITY, AND PROGRESS.

WE UNDERSTAND THE WEIGHT OF THESE EXPECTATIONS, AND WE DO NOT TAKE THEM LIGHTLY. DESPITE THE OBSTACLES, GOVERNMENT REMAINS COMMITTED TO A VISION THAT PRIORITIZES TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND MEANINGFUL CHANGE FOR THE PEOPLE OF FIJI.

I WOULD LIKE TO OUTLINE THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRESSIVE AGENDA AND LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME AS IT RELATES TO MY MINISTRY.

MR SPEAKER, THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO ADDRESS WIDESPREAD COMMUNITY CONCERNS ABOUT THE SUPREME LAW OF FIJI, BY INTRODUCING INTO PARLIAMENT A BILL TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION. HIS EXCELLENCY HAS SAID THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO ENSURE THAT OUR SUPREME LAW ALIGNS WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVITY, FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE.

MR SPEAKER, THERE HAVE BEEN CONCERNS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM OVER THE RIGOROUS AMENDMENT PROCESS OUTLINED IN CHAPTER 11 OF THE CONSTITUTION.

A SENIOR JURIST WHO VISITED FIJI RECENTLY SAID IT IS ONE OF THE HARDEST CONSTITUTIONS IN THE WORLD TO AMEND. PARADOXICALLY, A CONSTITUTION WHICH IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CHANGE, OR NEAR IMPOSSIBLE TO CHANGE, IS THE VERY ANTITHESIS OF DEMOCRACY. ITS RIGIDITY CARRIES THE SEEDS OF POTENTIAL DISAFFECTION AND INSTABILITY.

A KEY PART OF GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME FOR THIS SESSION OF PARLIAMENT IS TO INTRODUCE A BILL TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION. A COUNTRY'S CONSTITUTION IS A LIVING, ORGANIC DOCUMENT WHICH SHOULD REFLECT THE WISHES AND BROAD CONSENSUS OF THE PEOPLE IT GOVERNS. IT SHOULD BE THE PRODUCT OF WIDE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, NOT SOMETHING THAT IS IMPOSED ON THE PEOPLE. SIMPLY PUT, AN IMPOSED CONSTITUTION, LACKS LEGITIMACY.

WE SHOULD NOT FEAR DISCUSSING OR MAKING CHANGES TO OUR SUPREME LAW. I RECOGNISE THAT IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO FEAR WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW OR UNDERSTAND. BUT CHANGE IS PART OF OUR EVOLUTION AS A YOUNG DEMOCRACY.

THE POLITICS OF FEARMONGERING IS FOR THE MISGUIDED AND THE IGNORANT.

THE USA CONSTITUTION, ADOPTED IN 1788, HAS HAD 27 AMENDMENTS. THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA HAS HAD 106 AMENDMENTS SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN 1950.

AS HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT HAS HIGHLIGHTED, AN IMPORTANT PRIORITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT, IS THE FORMULATION OF A STRENGTHENED INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK THAT SETS STANDARDS FOR THE CONDUCT OF PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS AND TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT.

THE NEW FRAMEWORK MR SPEAKER WILL DELIVER ON THE LAWS, PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES NEEDED TO SET THE STANDARDS OF INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY THAT BUILD COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE IN OUR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, STATUTORY BODIES AND OFFICE HOLDERS.

BETWEEN DECEMBER LAST YEAR AND FEBRUARY THIS YEAR, THE FIJI LAW REFORM COMMISSION CONDUCTED NATIONWIDE CONSULTATIONS ON SOME OF THE KEY LEGISLATIVE REFORMS IN THE AREA OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND OTHER GOVERNANCE LAWS.

WITH AN INFORMED CITIZENRY, GOVERNMENTS CAN BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR POLICIES. ACCESS TO INFORMATION LAWS CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AS THEY REQUEST INFORMATION RELATING TO HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION, AND OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES.

THIS GOVERNMENT HAS HEARD THE PEOPLE AND UNDERSTANDS THAT A NEW LAW IS NEEDED TO ENABLE THEM TO EXERCISE THE RIGHT TO ACCESS INFORMATION THAT AFFECTS THEM AND THE MATTERS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THEIR LIVES. OVER 100 COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD HAVE IMPLEMENTED SOME FORM OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION LEGISLATION.

WITH THAT IN MIND, MR SPEAKER, THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSES TO CREATE NEW WAYS FOR PEOPLE TO REQUEST GOVERNMENT INFORMATION AND ENSURE THAT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ARE RESPONSIVE TO THEIR REQUESTS BY PROVIDING A SUITE OF OVERSIGHT POWERS TO THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY COMMISSION.

THE GOVERNMENT WILL MEET OUR PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS BY ENSURING THAT THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY COMMISSION HAS THE NECESSARY POWERS TO UPHOLD AND ENFORCE STANDARDS.

THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO A STRONG INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK WILL BE FURTHER DELIVERED WITH IMPORTANT LAW REFORM THAT SETS CLEAR STANDARDS OF CONDUCT FOR

THOSE WHO SERVE IN PUBLIC OFFICE. A NEW CODE OF CONDUCT LAW WILL BE INTRODUCED IN THE CURRENT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT.

HIS EXCELLENCY HAS POINTEDLY REMINDED US THAT THIS LAW HAS BEEN PENDING FOR A FEW DECADES. ITS ENACTMENT IS THEREFORE LONG OVERDUE. THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION FOR ANY FURTHER PROCRASTINATION.

LAST FRIDAY, I WAS PLEASED TO HAVE ACCOMPANIED HON DPM AND MINISTER FOR FINANCE ON A PROVINCIAL TOUR OF KADAVU.

IN JUST OVER A DAY, WE VISITED OR PASSED VUNISEA, NAMALATA, TAVUKI, SOLODAMU, NAMUANA, TABUYA, RICHMOND, NAQALOTU, WAISOMI RAVITAKI, MOKOISA, DAVIQELE, NABUKELEVU AND MUANI.

OUR TIGHT SCHEDULE DID NOT PERMIT US TO VISIT OTHER PARTS OF KADAVU. KADAVU HAS 75 VILLAGES, SO WE MERELY “SRATCHED THE SURFACE” UNFORTUNATELY.

I HOPE A FUTURE TRIP WILL PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT OTHER PARTS.

THE PROVINCE WHICH HAS ENOURMOUS POTENTIAL, HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY NEGLECTED SINCE INDEPENDENCE. THIS WAS OBVIOUS FROM THE STATE OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE INCLUDING HEALTH, EDUCATION, POWER AND OTHER FACILITIES WHICH WE INSPECTED.

SOME CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE TO ENSURE SUBSTANDARD HOUSING QUARTERS AND OVERCROWDING.

IN MANY VILLAGES, THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND COASTAL EROSION POSE A THREAT.

THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF ANY LARGE SCALE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY (APART FROM YAQONA FARMING), TO PROVIDE REGULAR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE ISLAND’S YOUTH, MANY OF WHOM ARE DRAWN TO SUVA AND OTHER URBAN CENTRES LOOKING FOR JOBS.

I HOPE GOVERNMENT'S NEXT BUDGET WILL ADDRESS SOME OF THESE GRIEVANCES. KADAVU'S PEOPLE DESERVE GREATER ATTENTION AND SUPPORT. THEY ARE NOT ASKING FOR MUCH.

HIS EXCELLENCY OBSERVED IN HIS SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT THAT ONE OF THE CHALLENGES FACING FIJI IS CLIMATE CHANGE AND THAT GOVERNMENT WILL ADVOCATE FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE ON THE GLOBAL STAGE.

FIJI'S ADVOCACY FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE HAS BEEN ROBUST.

FOR A COUNTRY OF OUR SIZE, OUR CONTRIBUTION HAS BEEN IMPRESSIVE.

AT COP29, OR THE 29TH UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE WHICH WAS HELD IN BAKU, AZERBAIJAN IN NOVEMBER 2024, FIJI AND SAMOA WERE THE ONLY TWO SIDS COUNTRIES THAT WERE PART OF THE SMALLER GROUP THAT SECURED THE AGREEMENT ON NEW COLLECTIVE QUANTIFIED GOAL OF USD 300 BILLION BY 2035 AND MOBILIZATION GOAL OF USD 1.3 TRILLION ANNUALLY FROM PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND OTHER INNOVATIVE SOURCES.

IN TERMS OF FIJI'S LEADERSHIP AT COP, FIJI HAS SERVED AND CONTINUES TO SERVE AS THE G77 AND CHINA COORDINATOR FOR ADAPATION MATTERS.

IN ADDITION, FIJI WAS NOMINATED AND SELECTED AS THE INCOMING OCEANS CO-CHAIR FOR THE OCEAN AND CLIMATE NEXUS DIALOGUE, WHICH IS THE PATHWAY TO GET OCEANS RECOGNIZED AS AN OFFICIAL UNFCCC AGENDA ITEM.

IN DECEMBER LAST YEAR, FIJI WAS AMONG THE 96 COUNTRIES AND 11 REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE PUBLIC HEARINGS ON CLIMATE CHANGE, AT THE HAGUE, THE SEAT OF THE WORLD COURT.

AMBASSADOR DAUNIVALU AND I PRESENTED FIJI'S LEGAL SUBMISSIONS TO THE ICJ.

WE URGED THE COURT TO DECLARE THAT FAILING TO ACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL LAW AND WE CALLED ON THE COURT TO AFFIRM THAT STATES HAVE A DUTY TO PREVENT HARM, PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS, AND ENSURE A LIVEABLE FUTURE FOR ALL.

THE ADVISORY OPINION OF THE ICJ IS EXPECTED TO DELIVER IN THE FIRST HALF OF THIS YEAR. IT IS LIKELY TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE ACTIONS AND AGREEMENTS FOR YEARS TO COME, POTENTIALLY INFLUENCING HOW STATES BEHAVE.

MR SPEAKER, I SUPPORT THE MOTION BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT.

THANK YOU MR SPEAKER SIR AND HON MEMBERS.