



**ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, HERITAGE AND ARTS  
DR.MAHENDRA REDDY**

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**STATEMENT AT THE 38TH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO**

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The President of the General Conference  
The Chairperson of the Executive Board  
Madame Director-General of UNESCO  
Excellencies  
Distinguished Delegations  
Ladies & Gentlemen

Bula vinaka to you all.

Allow me to extend my profound congratulations to UNESCO on behalf of the Fiji Government for having reached its 70th Anniversary this month.

Fiji celebrates with the rest of the world in acknowledging immense contributions of UNESCO to education, culture, sciences, communications & information.

I pay tribute to those visionary leaders who helped UNESCO steer the organization successfully and strategically through very unstable and challenging periods since its inception in November, 1945 to achieve long lasting peace throughout the world.

I reaffirm with deep convictions that we all must embrace UNESCO's vision that it is in men that wars begun and it is in the minds of men & women that peace shall be built.

Mr President

In my maiden speech this morning in this august body of UNESCO I would like to reflect on Fiji's achievements.

You are well aware that Fiji successfully completed its general elections in September last year giving a clear mandate to the Fiji First Party to govern Fiji for the next 4 years. With its new 50 member Parliament, I am proud to say that Fiji has and will continue to assume its global role amongst the democracies of the world.

Fiji has continued to leap forward in its economic growth reaching more than 4% since 2012 and 5.3% in 2014 and domestic and foreign investments continue to grow their businesses in Fiji, bringing much relief to the people in terms of employment opportunities, better living standards, healthy lifestyles and much more robust and dynamic communities.

We are indeed grateful for UNESCO's immense contribution in education, culture, natural and human sciences and communication and information in Fiji. These are in the areas of numerous capacity building programmes, assistance to international and regional conferences, technical support, funding and undertaking research work to name a few. Equally, we are privileged to have been assisted by UNESCO in support of the continuous development of the Historical Port Town of Levuka which was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in June, 2013.

Mr President

On gender equality, as this is the global priority of UNESCO and reflecting on the Education 2030 and Framework for Action, Fiji will continue to strengthen its gender policy by ensuring that women & men have equal opportunities for recruitment and promotion, in schools, for capacity building, for selection of in-service & pre-service of teachers, the eradication of gender violence towards women & girls and to strengthen the programmes and initiatives to reduce and prevent school-related-gender –based -violence.

Fiji has made great strides in the education sector.

The Government allocated for the first time the highest budget of \$559.4million this year for education which is equivalent to 16.7% of the total government budget. Currently it is proud to show the following:

- Fiji's adult literacy rate stands at 93%.
- There are 1000 ECE centers, 730 primary schools with 139,162 students & 170 secondary schools with 67,250 students and a teaching staff of 10, 400 teachers.
- There are 3 major universities and a number of higher education institutions.

We have strategized for reforms in education that we have embarked on from late last year, continuing on from the reforms undertaken prior to elections last year by the reigning Bainimarama government.

Also this year we have revamped & reformed the Ministry of Education to make it more effective and efficient with a more output oriented approach. We decided to adopt a reform strategy pegged on three key pillars:

Pillar 1: Improvement of delivery by our Teachers;

Pillar 2: Improvement of the School Infrastructure for enhancement of student learning environment;

Pillar 3: Improvement and enhancement of Content.

The areas where we have reformed include:

- Providing fee-free grant for all students from preschool to Year 13.
- Providing free textbooks
- Free transport assistance
- Free milk for Year 1 in primary schools
- One tablet/laptop per child as part of our commitment towards Digital Literacy.
- Establishment of new technical colleges throughout Fiji. We intend to increase it to 10 in 2016.
- Increase in salary for Early Childhood Education teachers as well as grants for each ECE centres and establishment of ECE centres in all primary schools.
- Mainstreaming of children with disabilities into primary and secondary schools.
- Compulsory teaching of the vernacular languages that is iTaukei and Hindi in schools
- Reviewed and developed the new National Curriculum Framework whereby it will have more local-based content.
- Re-introduction of external examinations from Year 6 to Year 11.
- Removal of scaling in all external examinations.
- Teacher & student evaluation of teachers

We have made sure that no child is left behind in terms of education. We would like to see a nation that responds to the dreams and aspirations of its younger generation. That every effort is made to see that we enhance an education system that provides inclusive, equitable and quality education.

Mr President

Like any other country we have our share of challenges and these are:

- the poor and lack of infrastructure and facilities at schools
- geographical spatial distribution of islands in Fiji
- quality of teacher training Institutions
- Quality of School Infrastructure/Facilities
- The Quality of Teachers

- Administration of a curriculum that is relevant, sustainable, adaptable and responsive to local and global needs.

The Samoa Pathways deliberately sets out the direction for the kind of education we would like to see flourish in the next decade.

I would like to mention a few.

- Affirming our full & equal access to quality education at all levels is an essential condition for achieving sustainable development and the efforts of national & regional & international efforts in this regard
- To provide high quality education & training for youth and girls with a focus on the most vulnerable, in particular persons with disabilities, including creative, cultural & environment –related fields.
- Increase their investment in education & training and skills development for all including vocational training and to improve their access to formal & informal education to gain entrepreneurial skills through the distance teaching and development of training approaches appropriate for small island developing states.

This is something that we would like to embrace and we will continue to build upon in the years to come.

Mr President

In culture these are the activities that we have embarked on

- Ratification of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- National Consultation on the UNESCO 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Expressions (Cultural Diversity)
- Signing of Bilateral Cultural Cooperation between Fiji and China
- Hosting Oceania countries for the 5th Pacific World Heritage Workshop
- Visit of the Director General for ICHCAP-Korea to Fiji paving the way for increased technical and financial assistance.
- Cultural Grants assistance as an impetus for increased cultural enterprise and income-generating initiatives for the people.
- Mainstreaming of culture and heritage in the new Curriculum Framework.
- Publication (SPC) – Pacific Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Toolkit
- Policy mapping of cultural institutions and infrastructures in Fiji
- Finalizing of Fiji Heritage Bill
- Drafting of National Cultural Policy, National ICH Strategy, Fiji Museum Policy etc.
- Current piloting of Alternative Well-being Indicators for Livelihood – a measure for happiness.

Currently, the following are some of the challenges that needs to be confronted:

- Embracing contemporary culture as part of a collective culture and heritage sector – to be covered in National Policy.
- Intellectual Property and Piracy Issues – effective enforcement & monitoring.
- Sustainability of cultural, heritage, arts projects & activities.
- Enlightenment of the general populace about cultural, heritage & arts issues.

In Social & Human Sciences Programs, Fiji has implemented the following:

- Fiji hosted the first Asia-Pacific Consultation on the 2013 Declaration of Berlin. Involving the region's International Olympic Committee and Oceania National Olympic Committee forward to the development of action plan focused on developing modules for sports policy and physical education in the Pacific
- The Quality Physical Education Package will be piloted in schools for the first time next year. The Ministry of Education since last year has collaborated with Ministry of Youth & Sports and its funding partners UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF implement this project in schools. The expected outcome of this is to reduce NCDS, promote healthy lifestyles and well-being and development of a more robust and dynamic PE policy.

Mr President

I will now provide some brief background on our National Archives.

The National Archives of Fiji has moved in leaps and bounds over the last 4 years. We have started on a reform programme to modernize operations and increase our impact on society. Firstly we have secured a staffing increase that has enabled us to implement quality assurance programmes to deal with numerous unplanned deposits that were taking up vital space and jeopardizing the proper management of our holdings. In addition NAF oversaw the successful restoration and digitization of a \$1 million dollar project to restore and digitize 2000 hours of unique historical Audio Visual footage that was in extreme degradation and on the verge of being lost for all time. This heritage is now fully accessible and being pushed out to the general populace through free to air television programming, at no cost to government. This footage holds important cultural heritage, some of which is no longer being observed and is to be used by the Indigenous Affairs ministry to revitalize such cultural practices.

Outreach activities have increased dramatically as NAF seeks to put the public (especially those in rural and isolated areas) in touch with their heritage. We have gone from 4 outreach exercises a year to 14 a year, and are on pace to complete 20 by end of 2015. Social media is also being used to good effect. Content is being published to the National Archives of Fiji facebook site and has captured the imagination of the Fiji public, with people quick to comment and add metadata (information). This is adding value to the national collection, and inspiring people to explore their personal and shared history through our archival records. This shared sense of history builds a collective national identity for a tolerant and peaceful nation; and is part of NAF's efforts to make Fiji an educated and knowledge based society. In

this regard the Fiji memory of the World Committee has also found success in getting the Polynesian Indenture Records on to the MOWCAP register, and inspired the authoring and inclusion of a “Family Tree Project” into the national educational curriculum.

In the communications and information sector,

We have also distributed One Learning Device for use by the Primary school students especially in the rural and remote areas. The government has also established ICT Telecentres to bridge the digital divide in rural /remote centres. We have also launched our Digital Literacy Programme in schools earlier this year in our bid to develop the digital exposure of our children so they can establish themselves as natives of this digital era that we live in. We have also secured assistance from developed countries to assist us in our quest to bridge this digital divide.

Mr President

In climate change, I would like to reiterate the words of our Hon Prime Minister when he delivered his statement at the UN General Assembly in September this year. He said “Like our neighbors in the South Pacific and other Small Island Developing States we see the bright future we have charted for ourselves deemed by the prospect of climate change and sea-level rise. Fiji has been outspoken in insisting that all nations do their duty to reduce carbon emissions and control the production of greenhouse gases. Fiji is doing its part but our part in creating these crises is very small particularly negligible, the more developed nations as well must do their part.”

Mr President

The Education 2030 Agenda with its Framework for Action as adopted at the World Conference of Education in Korea in May this year sets a clear pathway for Fiji to reassess its commitment and to map the way forward. Fiji being a developing country cannot do these alone as we rely on UNESCO and the more developed countries for further assistance.

Finally, I convey my well wishes for a successful conference.

Thank You.

References

PM Speech at UN Assembly, September 2015

SIDS & developing countries - SAMOA PATHWAY- 3rd International Conference on SIDS

Thank you.