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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade for
the Eradication of Colonialism: accelerating action**

**Denarau, Nadi, Fiji
21 to 23 May 2014**

WELCOME ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

PRIME MINISTER FRANK BAINIMARAMA



Rear Admiral J. V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National
Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and
Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral
Resources

STATEMENT AT THE PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE UN SPECIAL
COMMITTEE ON DECOLONISATION

Sofitel Resort
DENARAU

Wed. 21st May, 2014
0930 Hours

Chairman of the Special Committee His Excellency

Xavier Lasso Mendoza,

Vice Chairpersons,

Distinguished Representatives and Observers of the

Special Committee on Decolonisation,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Fiji and
to this Regional Seminar of the UN's Special
Committee on Decolonisation.

This is the fourth time that Fiji has hosted this Seminar over the course of the last 16 years.

On behalf of the Fijian people and the Government of Fiji, Bula vinaka! Welcome back.

Understanding that many different and unique relationships of what we would call colonialism exist, our task is to sort them out and find solutions that are both principled and pragmatic.

In order to do that, I believe we must listen to the people. If they choose independence, we must respect and support their decision; if they choose some form of association, we must support their right to negotiate as equals - the relationship that best serves their interests. In Fiji, we are neutral about what each person decides, but we are most adamant that the decision must be theirs.

If we take this principled and pragmatic approach, then our emotions can be channeled into the joy of

knowing that each country has had the ability and freedom to determine its own future.

This regional seminar provides an opportunity for you as delegates and members of the Special Committee to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that face the 17 territories listed on the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

The Special Committee will then convene in New York next month, where it will address progress in the efforts for self-determination - together with other developments - within these non self-governing territories.

As I'm sure most of you are aware, the process of decolonisation involves a much broader collection of issues than those specifically related to self-determination.

It involves careful consideration of what I would call "nation-building issues." Issues like education; social

structures; infrastructure; institutions; political legacies; and natural resources, to name just a few.

All these areas must be discussed as part of any decision on self-determination, so that a country is equipped not just to take control of its political destiny, but its future development across a broad front.

We know all too well here in Fiji how legacies from the colonial era have challenged development, hindered progress and prevented a country from moving forward as a unified nation-state.

Fiji inherited colonial institutions at its Independence that served as sources of division within our society. In the years that followed, certain members of the elite were able to exploit these institutions to further sow the seeds of discord and fear in our communities in self-serving attempts to protect their own privileged positions.

I'm sure that most of you are aware of the struggles we have faced over the past quarter century, so I will not linger on them in detail.

Suffice it to say that we have only recently emerged from this era of turmoil and strife after a period of reforms and bold leadership, culminating, finally, in a Constitution that is worthy of the Fijian people. One that upholds the legal and moral basis of common and equal citizenry without denying anyone's individuality or culture.

Under this Constitution, our country will go to the polls in September, when for the first time all Fijians will have an equal vote for who they want to lead our nation's new parliamentary democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm proud to say that Fiji is working with the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Special Committee itself to support the efforts of the Kanak

people in New Caledonia for the transfer of power to the New Caledonian authorities as per the roadmap set out by the Noumea Accord.

As would be expected, a number of challenges have emerged, but Fiji will continue to encourage both sides to work positively within the spirit of the Agreement towards a result that is seen as legitimate by all parties.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I urge you to make the most of the three days of this seminar to hear the unique stories of all the non-self governing territories represented here, and to consider how best the Special Committee can support them.

As the UN Secretary-General himself said at the organisational session of the Special Committee last year, “fresh and creative” approaches are required, and the Committee no longer has “the luxury of

indulging in rhetoric and rituals.” Such fresh and creative approaches must come from you, the delegates and representatives on the Committee.

Having said that, I hope that you will find a little time to enjoy the hospitality and friendliness of the Fijian people, and to explore our country and all it has to offer its guests.

With these few remarks, I have the great honour to officially open the 2014 Pacific Regional Seminar on Decolonisation.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.