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MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS

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Republic of Fiji

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**HON LAISENIA TUITUBOU**

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**Madam Speaker,** I am honoured to address this august House on current and future youth development activities my Ministry is undertaking around Fiji. Against the backdrop of the speech by our President, His Excellency, Major-General (Rtd) Jioji Konusi Konrote, we need to focus on equality, a common identity and civil, socio and economic rights. We need to focus on modernising the economy, increasing economic opportunities and encouraging economic development throughout our country.

**Madam Speaker,** the actual number of youth varies and I hope that the Census will provide us with more certainty. It will be a snapshot of the status in Fiji at a particular point in time. Current

figures indicate that up to 70% of our population is youth under 40. This is significant and indicates the challenge we face as a country in ensuring full employment to ensure our economy continues to grow – not just for eight years but every year. We need to take up the challenge of bringing more women into the formal economy; more persons with disabilities into the informal and formal economy; increasing our capacity to innovate and create. This is all set against the background of academic and practical training, formal and non-formal training, being provided across a number of Ministries which needs to be coordinated to ensure maximum impact.

**Madam Speaker**, recognising the fact that the majority of youth live in our urban areas, my Ministry is providing more support for our urban youth as part of a number of new areas of focus. We recognise that the traditional training we provide for rural areas will need to be adjusted to meet the needs of urban youth. We intend to provide training for youth to develop job application skills, trades and technology skills - all with accredited service providers. We will continue to provide leadership and

management skills within the differing contexts of urban and rural settings.

However, we need more clearly to understand the skills required for the economy. I have just returned from the Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting and almost all those attending have a similar experience – the mismatch of skills being provided through our educational institutions and the needs of our economy. We need to get ahead and to think of our economy in 20 years' time and start building for it now. We need vision to do that and we need the strong will and determination to change the way we do things, to change our traditions and cultures to fit our modern society.

**Madam Speaker**, my Ministry is ready to take on this challenge and we are changing the way we support our young people. I will establish a National Youth Advisory Board in the next weeks to advise my Ministry on the needs of the youth and how best we can meet them. Our Non-Formal Education Council will soon meet to address coordination in this area as there are several

Ministries in this business and a larger number of NGOs, many of whom provide almost the same training. These will be fully representative of our communities. We will focus on the youth and particularly youth at risk.

**Madam Speaker,** as I have reported to this House previously, we are expanding our cooperation with the Fiji Corrections Service. We have provided our values based training for young men and women inmates in Suva and we are going to extend this to the North and West. We will work soon to identify young people who have been in our correctional facilities who can be trained to offer our Seeds of Success training in communities and the correctional facilities. We believe that this will not only provide a small source of income for those young people identified but will also ensure that peers talk to peers about how to put their lives back on track when they reintegrate into their communities.

We hope soon to introduce the Duke of Edinburgh International Award to our youth in correctional facilities as well as to those in

the red zones which face a strong probability of going to prison. We need to work together to prevent that happening by empowering our youth with values of respect and tolerance, of hard work and determination, to develop abilities of problem solving, debate and discussion while respecting different opinions. The Duke of Edinburgh International Award has been operating in Fiji since 1965 and has had highs and lows. We are determined to ensure that this programme serves the needs of our youth from the ages of 14 to 24 as it helps young people develop life-skills which require sustained effort and self-directed learning. It promotes many basic requirements for an enquiring mind – *skills development* from learning sign language to baking, *getting physically active* which is essential given our non-communicable disease challenges, *giving service* to those less fortunate and *experiencing an adventure* so young people from the urban areas go and stay in a village context for the first time and vice versa.

I have spoken before of our efforts to involve more women in our training. This is an ongoing focus as we seek to recruit more

women to undertake carpentry in our training centres in Sigatoka, Macuata and Kadavu. We hope, but expect this to take a bit longer, to recruit some men into the traditional women's activities of cooking, bakery and perhaps massage! This does require us to change our gender stereotypes and it does require us all in this House, **Madam Speaker**, to contribute to this. Unless and until we live in equality, we will not achieve it in Fiji.

**Madam Speaker**, I was delighted to inform this House last year that we had encouraged young women in Koro to participate in basic carpentry training. I am even more delighted to say that this trend continued in the West, North and Central Divisions. We worked with the Technical College of Fiji and the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to help communities to rebuild their houses after Tropical Cyclone Winston. We are now working to distribute some basic carpentry tools as these communities were very happy to get the skills but they now need the tools to rebuild.

Further, **Madam Speaker**, we have broken a new barrier to women's participation in our programmes. In July 2017, in Yanuca, for the first time ever, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji trained two young women as boatmasters at training organised by my Ministry. After the first day, the young women told their friends about the training. On the second day, several more came hoping to join; unfortunately this was not possible. As one of the young women said when receiving her certificate: "what men can do, women can do better". This needs to become the mantra of young women and guide us all as we continue to break down barriers and create equality.

My Ministry, **Madam Speaker**, has also embarked on working more closely with the Ministry of Agriculture. My colleague, the Minister, Honorable Inia Seruiratu, has indicated that he wants to get more young people into agriculture and like me, he wants to ensure that this becomes a commercial operation. Modern techniques including soil analysis to ensure young people grow what is appropriate is key. Due to the price of yaqona, there is a lot being produced but as we know, what goes up must come

down. It is therefore important for young farmers to diversify and ensure that there is a consistent supply of whatever product they commit to. With the Ministry of Agriculture, we are working to ensure funding gets to the young people and that with my Ministry's support, the Ministry of Agriculture is providing technical expertise to provide the mentorship which is so necessary to ensure success.

I anticipate a similar partnership to develop with the Ministry of Forests as we work to ensure that forests lost as we expand our agricultural commitment are compensated by planting new trees. This will also ensure we address our carbon footprint. With support from the Ministry of Fisheries, we hope similarly to create economic opportunities with young people establishing shrimp and crab farms as well as developing our seaweed industry. The opportunities are endless and we need to prioritise and coordinate our efforts. We are absolutely committed to this.

My Ministry is focusing on youth at risk. We will work more closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in a

number of areas. These include NCDs as increasing physical activity is key, with improving nutrition, to addressing this challenge. We are also looking to work to address the unfortunately high number of young people who commit suicide each year. We need to raise awareness of this and ensure that young people are referred to experts to help them and their families address the issue. Further, we are about to launch formally our sexual reproductive health and rights manual which has been developed in partnership with the Ministry and the United Nations Population Fund. We will roll this out with peer counsellors from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and our staff while also working with other young people who are willing to take on a training role. After consulting various young people, they have said that they need this training even though it is provided in our schools. We hope that this will help to address the issue of teenage pregnancies and STIs, the need for both young men and women to take responsibility and ensure that they are given the support they need and not be deserted by friends and family. We need to find ways to ensure that young women, despite their new responsibilities, are not deprived of education.

With the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, we are working to identify young people who have dropped out of school and university. We aim to help them back into formal education, to provide skills training where required and to support them into entrepreneurial activities with support from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism. However, to be able to assist those who drop out of tertiary education, we need to access the information from universities and this is something we are working on.

**Madam Speaker,** we have ensured that all our staff become more gender sensitive in our operations and this has been done with support from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. In addition, we have trained up to 150 young people in Navosa/Nadroga with the FWCC, about 60 from the Eastern Division generally and a further 50 in Gau. We are looking to train a number in the urban areas and settlements in line with our focus on urban areas. We believe that this will help us break the cycle of violence against

women and children and we thank UNICEF and UNFPA for their support for this initiative.

With the Honorable Prime Minister taking on the presidency of COP23 in a short while, **Madam Speaker**, and in response to requests from our youth, my Ministry is working on a climate change initiative. I was a Panellist in the 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Minister's Meeting representing the SIDS (32 Islands) in August and stating the stand of the Fiji Government on Climate Change. The outcome of that discussion enabled us to have a Bilateral meeting with the Canadian Youth Minister. His Government is willing to assist the Government of Fiji, after learning our strategy on some SIDS. With the Climate Change Unit, the Fiji Higher Education Commission and UNICEF, we have recently trained some of our staff and young people in a regional qualification on climate change, disaster risk reduction and resilience. This is a pilot and one which we hope to roll out as we source funding. Our young people see climate change but they want to know what to do about it and this is our way of addressing this issue.

**Madam Speaker,** I now want to address the other part of our work which is as important as youth. Sport is in Fiji's DNA. However, I think that the DNA in many of us makes us spectators rather than participants. My Ministry is finalising the National Sports and Physical Activity Policy, recognising our role in promoting physical activity. This also recognises the importance of physical activity in the fight against NCDs. We need to turn our spectators into active participants. This has to be regardless of age as our elders benefit equally from regular physical activity. It helps to mitigate the impact of arthritis, heart disease, dementia and other challenges we all may need to face in our twilight years. Our children will benefit from skills development through physical education and we are working with the Ministry of Education to develop a quality PE curriculum. In addition, we hope that this will include learning to swim which is a very necessary life-skill, particularly given our affinity to the ocean. We are working, with funding which my Ministry sought out from the former UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace, to develop a PE curriculum for our learners with disabilities. This

project is being led in implementation by the Sports Commission and various stakeholders in an inclusive way.

This financial year, **Madam Speaker**, we will work with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and Tourism Fiji to develop a policy and strategy related to sports tourism. This is a potential area of growth for us as we work to entice new visitors to Fiji as part of our overall tourism strategy. We need to develop a sophisticated approach to which events we bid for and the basis for our bid. We are delighted that we will be hosting the Oceania Rugby 7s Championships for the next three years; the World Junior Weightlifting Championships in 2019 and the U20 World Cup of netball in 2021. These are good events for us to host. The Oceania event will contribute to our bid to host a leg of the HSBC 7s Series and both the Weightlifting and Netball events will bring the youth of the world to our shores and hopefully their friends and family. There are other events which may not seem so attractive but will be successful in terms of media coverage. There will be different reasons for bidding to host different events.

I am delighted, **Madam Speaker**, that the Vodafone Arena will be upgraded. This will be a significant undertaking by the Fiji Sports Council and will put the venue out of operation for at least nine months next year. However, it will be a great asset once it is refurbished and add to our ability to host major regional and world sports events. The Vodafone Arena has served us well since it was first commissioned in 2003 through support from the Chinese Government. Once it is returned to its former glory, the Fiji Sports Council must ensure that it is well maintained going forward. We look forward to the refurbishment of the hockey and swimming facilities in Laucala Bay also through the support of the Chinese Government and we thank our friends for their ongoing generosity.

This year, **Madam Speaker**, we have seen a welcome increase in the funding for sport. As a result, we hope that the Fiji National Sports Commission will promote the development of sport at a grassroots level in a consistent way. Like the Ministry, the Sports Commission is also focusing more on working in urban

areas. Working with our National Sports Organisations, we hope see an increase in the sustainability of physical activity programmes and basic sports competitions in our communities.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services measures the health of our people in joint outreach programmes run with the Sports Commission. However, the Sports Commission, the Ministry of Health and my Ministry must go the next step to advise on both nutrition and physical activity regimens to ensure we address NCDs in a comprehensive way. It is likely that we will need to train people to be able to do this as individual programmes are devised.

**Madam Speaker,** following the review of the National Sports and Physical Activity Policy, we need to focus our energies more on the development of people through sport. This means a number of things including more funding for development as we are heavily focused on elite competitions. If we are able to get more people active, we expand the pool of talent from which we can select our national teams. That can only be a good thing for

Fiji. We need to rebalance our focus to ensure we are treating our sports equally and that more women and persons with disabilities get active. We have talent in athletics, netball, volleyball and another 30 sports. Many of our young athletes, either through influence from their school or family and friends, focus on one sport. We need to allow our children to experience the different sports on offer, **Madam Speaker**, so that they can make the right choice for themselves. If they are only exposed to a few sports and do not have the talent for those sports, we will only lose that talent because of a lack of opportunity. Our NSOs need to work together to support talent rather than compete for the currently small pool of talent coming through. If we are able to select from 100% of our population across the full spectrum of sports, we will improve our standards in international competitions in all our sports.

**Madam Speaker**, we are all well aware of sport's power to promote inclusion, national identity, respect for rules, mutual respect and it is something we should cherish and nurture. In the same vein, we also need to support our athletes who earn

their living in other countries. Fiji was able to intervene at the recent world gathering of Ministers responsible for sport to add a key issue to the Kazan Action Plan. This is the need to work together across national boundaries to ensure athletes are not exploited in the work environment. This was done with support from other Pacific countries and drew praise from the organisations representing professional athletes and professional footballers world-wide. It is unfortunately not an issue that affects just Pacific Islanders.

My Ministry, **Madam Speaker**, is working to develop our monitoring and evaluation systems. I am determined that we move from our previous output approach where we merely tick the box to a way in which we can measure the impact of our programmes on the youth, on sport and physical activity. This will ensure we achieve value for money.

**Madam Speaker**, there is much work to do. With the increasing number of partnerships being established by my Ministry, we will

continue to serve the needs of our youth and promote good mental and physical health through physical activity.

To conclude, **Madam Speaker**, my Ministry will continue to carry out its roles and functions for youth in the four Divisions and continuously strive to meet the unique challenges of our youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Fiji. **Madam Speaker:** I commend His Excellency's words to the House and thank his wisdom and guidance.

Vinaka.