



REPUBLIC OF THE FIJI ISLANDS

GENERAL DEBATE

64TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Statement by

Hon. Commodore Josaia Voreqe BAINIMARAMA

PRIME MINISTER

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The President of the United Nations General Assembly

Mr. Secretary General,

Distinguished Colleagues, Delegates,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mr President,

I extend to you, and this Assembly, our warm greetings: Ni sa Bula vinaka.

I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the Presidency of this, the 64th session of the General Assembly.

I pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann for presiding over the 63rd Session with great sensitivity and also bringing a human face to our work.

Mr. President,

The 64th Session of the General Assembly will be addressing important contemporary issues of interest to all member nations.

These issues include seeking out effective responses to global crises, strengthening multi-lateralism and dialogue on international peace, security and development. These issues are indeed of critical importance to my own country, a small island developing state, which has been enriched by its membership and participation in the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Fiji and its people, like all small developing island states, are among the first victims of contemporary global crises such as the financial and economic crisis, the swine flu pandemic, and most dramatic of all, the phenomenon of climate change. In small economies such as ours, these global events have a very real effect on the daily livelihoods of our people. For our part, we have attempted to respond to some of these crises by making policy changes and adjustments, encouraging our people to grow their own food, and discouraging food imports wherever possible. Over the last two years the size of the public service has been rationalized.

We have maintained a very streamlined Cabinet structure and significantly controlled government operational costs.

Mr. President,

There have been critics of the events in Fiji since December 2006, when the military, with great reluctance was forced to remove the then government of Fiji. I believe that these critics are largely unaware of the extent to which politicians, in league with those who employ terror as a tactic to push a racial supremacy and corrupt agenda, had become a threat to the safety and security of our people.

Terrorism has become a global issue and it impacts Fiji as well. We are fully cooperating in the international effort to control and contain this scourge.

Mr. President,

Next year on October the 10th, Fiji will celebrate the 40th year of its independence and the 40th anniversary of our membership of the United Nations. We embraced our independence full of enthusiasm, excited by the prospect of deciding our own future and believing that our community as a whole would work together in order to achieve a better life for all our people. Our path has not been smooth or easy.

His Excellency the President of Fiji abrogated the Constitution on 10 April of this year. He took this step when the Court of Appeal ruling created a legal vacuum, a constitutional anomaly which would have also prevented the implementation of the reforms which were mandated by him, to achieve a truly democratic state.

On 1st July, of this year I announced a road map intended to lead Fiji to a new Constitution, and elections based on equality, equal suffrage, human rights, justice, transparency, modernity and true democratic ideals.

Mr. President,

I and my Government were mandated to carry out and continue the reforms which will ensure that true, democratic, non-communal, and equal suffrage based elections for parliamentary representation are held by September 2014. A roadmap to implement this mandate was announced on 1st July of this year.

Together with stringent steps to protect our economy from the effects of the world economic crisis, work will commence on a new Constitution by September 2012. The basis for the new Constitution will be the ideals and principles formulated by the People's Charter for Change and

Progress, a document prepared following widespread consultations with, and input from, the people of Fiji. The People's Charter was adopted by His Excellency the President after the endorsement of the majority of the People of Fiji.

Mr. President,

Work on the new Constitution will involve consultations with all the ordinary citizens of our country as well as civil society groups. Consultations will focus on issues such as the size of the new parliament, the sustainability of a bi-cameral system, the term of office of a government and systems of accountability of government to the people.

Mr. President,

The new Constitution, implementing the reforms and the result of extensive consultations, will be in place by September 2013. This will give the people of Fiji, a year to become familiar with its provisions before elections in September 2014.

There have been critics of this time line. These critics ask why work on the new constitution will not commence before September 2012. The answer is very simple, at least to those who know and understand Fiji's history. Fiji has had a colonial history which created many anomalies and inequalities, the legacy of which resonates today. Consequently and of the making of the politicians, our post-colonial period has been punctuated with political instability. On each occasion that a new government is voted into power, the old elite which benefited financially from the previous established government has been able to successfully destabilize the government and to replace it with its own supporters and representatives. This was only possible because those institutions of the State which were supposed to protect democracy and democratic values, instead colluded with the elite, to destabilize and replace the new government. That is not all.

Fiji has suffered more than 20 years of mismanagement, corruption, and nepotism. Our infrastructure, our judicial system, and our systems of accountability have all remained underdeveloped and unproductive. Many of our finest brains have left the country to migrate, because they could see no future in a country governed by ethno-nationalism, corruption and greed. In order to ensure that democracy has a real chance of survival in Fiji's future, serious, and principled reforms must be implemented to build roads, institutions and values.

Together with infrastructure, the hearts and minds of our people must adopt and cherish true democracy. The way of the old elite must never triumph again.

There must be reforms before elections, to ensure that democracy is sustainable for Fiji's long term future. The people of Fiji, deserve better than the short term band-aid solutions we have experienced over the past decades.

Mr. President,

I ask for patience and understanding particularly from our neighbours who have shown a surprising lack of understanding and disregard of the peculiar situation which our country has experienced since independence. Put another way, Mr. President, there is an almost blind faith that once independence has been granted to those who were under colonial rule, and the machinery of democracy begins to work, that the country concerned would have plain sailing. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I invite the international community to engage with us, visit our country to see the situation for themselves and to provide practical support and assistance to enable us to implement the reforms.

Mr. President,

History is replete with the struggles of people the world over for self determination, to be free from subjugation and foreign domination. Our own experience should have provided some indication if one is needed, how difficult it has been for us to achieve true, genuine and sustainable democracy.

Many of the nations represented in this Hall today have experienced the traumas of nation building. It would not be out of place to reflect on what President Obama said during his address to the General Assembly on Wednesday, 23rd of September of 2009, and I quote:

'Democracy cannot be imposed on any nation from the outside. Each society must search for its own path, and no path is perfect. Each country will pursue a path rooted in the culture of its people and its past traditions....'

We thoroughly endorse such sentiments.

Mr. President,

Our dream is for equality. For justice. For safety. Our dream is for dignity. For economic well being. Our dream is for true democracy. I thank those of our friends who have had continued dialogue with me and my government and who have helped us to achieve what they themselves now take for granted. I thank Fiji's friends for their respect and understanding even when we agree to differ on some issues. If there is to be genuine dialogue, at both the regional and the international levels, there must be a willingness to listen, to respect a different point of view.

To those nations who have refused to engage with Fiji, who have expressed an unwillingness to enter into dialogue, I can only repeat my plea to you to change your stance. Fiji is a small nation. Our people pose no threat to anyone, least of all to the big powers of the South Pacific who

have arrogated to themselves the right to dictate to us our future and the way we govern ourselves.

We respect the right of anyone who disagree with us to exercise their freedom. However, that does not give them the right to interfere with our efforts to build a better country for our people.

In all of this, they have used their extensive diplomatic and financial resources to deny Fiji to participate in new peacekeeping operations. Fiji has participated in peacekeeping operations since 1978 and is proud of its association with the United Nations, in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Indeed, the Fiji Military Forces, since the beginning of its participation in peacekeeping has established a reputation for professionalism, skill and rapport with the communities in its areas of operation.

Fiji has been disappointed by what appears to be a unilateral decision on the part of the United Nations to debar our country from any new peacekeeping operations. To this day, we have not been able to receive a clear and satisfactory reply on this matter from the United Nations. I express the hope that the United Nations will deal equitably and fairly with troop-contributing countries.

Our experiences as a member of the United Nations, and particularly with peacekeeping, will be strengthened and enhanced by our People's Charter, and the roadmap to elections. These aptly demonstrate the positive values of genuine dialogue and engagement. If we are to achieve genuine peace, security and development in our country, we believe we must build on a foundation of patience and respect for all views.

Mr. President,

Like most small island nations, Fiji regards the threat posed by Climate Change as one that will undermine International Peace and Security. The lives of real people from real places are at stake. The future survival of real generations, the continuation of real cultures, and the security of belonging to a real homeland are being threatened.

The adverse impact posed by Climate Change is politically blind; its devastating effect on humanity will far outweigh any ideology or systems of belief devised by man. The potential casualty of its impact could be far greater than any of the battles we've ever fought. Yet, the ability to reverse its advancement is well within our collective control.

Fiji is thankful to the general membership of this Assembly for accepting in its last session a resolution advanced by Small Island Developing States linking the threat of climate change to security. Some of Fiji's closest neighbors live amongst the lowest lying atolls in the world. The rise in sea level brought about by climate change potentially threatens to literally drown their

very existence. Why should they be forced to abandon their homeland for no fault of their own? All human beings have the right to live in their ancestral homeland if they so choose.

Mr. President,

It is vital to understand that no measure of financial assistance can resurrect what has submerged, no measure of financial assistance can generate rain to end drought, no measure of financial assistance can reverse the effects of natural disasters or replace what has been lost as a result of climate change. No small island state can survive the future by merely mitigating its impacts. Adaptation and mitigation are not enough. We can only halt the impacts of climate change and ensure the survival of every island state by significantly reducing carbon emissions.

It is on this premise that Fiji, as one of the more vulnerable States to the impacts of climate change, calls on all States, in particular the major emitters, to be responsible and committed to carbon emission reduction targets of around 45% from 1990 levels by 2020 and 85% reduction by 2050, with below 350 parts per million global atmospheric concentration and further, to limit temperature increases to below 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level by 2020. May I emphasize, that this is the minimum reduction level that can realistically address the devastating impacts of climate change that we currently face.

To fail these targets, the probability of risk is astoundingly high for the most vulnerable. To negotiate on these targets, means negotiating the lives of millions.

The inequity that exists in terms of the extent of our vulnerabilities and our ability to meet mitigating costs vis-a-vis our contribution to climate change has divided our views and weakened our collective strength to deal with this global issue. These inequitable circumstances are further complicated by the conflicting political and economic interests of States. Understandably, decisions and positions are founded on national self-interests which in most cases take priority over the principles of equity and responsibility.

These are the differences that create the challenges that we currently face as an international community in achieving a binding international agreement that responds to the current most fundamental need of the world – its survival.

Mr. President

Fiji hopes that political goodwill and compromise will be found on the road to Copenhagen. That the necessary platform on which a fair, effective and ambitious climate change regime is found sooner. A regime that ensures the significant reduction of carbon emissions and the creation of a financial regime that supports the adaptation and mitigation needs of every country, particularly the most vulnerable.

Mr. President,

My government is committed to upholding the principles and values contained in the Charter of the United Nations, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other UN Conventions. We are determined and committed to the elimination of all policies and legislations that are inconsistent with our international obligations. We wish to create a new and brighter future for our people based on equality, dignity and respect.

Mr. President

We seek your understanding and that of the community of nations, and your support in achieving our dreams.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Vinaka Vakalevu, I thank you all.
