



Republic of Fiji

**STATEMENT BY COMMODORE JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
AT THE
GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE 66TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL
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**The President of the United Nations General Assembly;
Mr. Secretary-General;
Distinguished Colleagues;
Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Ni sa bula vinaka and warm greetings to you all from the Government and people of Fiji.

May I take this opportunity Mr. President, to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the General Assembly's 66th Session, and pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Dr. Joseph Deiss.

This year, it was my honour to open new Fijian Missions in both Indonesia and South Africa. The Fiji High Commission in Pretoria is our first diplomatic mission on the continent of Africa and we see it as a gateway to that great continent. Our new Embassy in Jakarta is intended to strengthen our warm fraternal relations with Indonesia. In the same spirit, I journey next week to Brazil to open Fiji's first Embassy on the South American continent.

In May this year, Mr President, Fiji had the privilege of being admitted to membership of the Non-Aligned Movement. We have pledged to play our full part in the Movement's activities, particularly in the area of South-South Co-operation and Sustainable Development.

These positive developments complement the Fijian Government's "*Look North Policy*" and our intention to expand relations with non-traditional partners. We believe such expansion of outlook is essential to our national development and our full participation in Fiji's global rights and responsibilities. Here at the United Nations, we are active members of the Asia-Pacific Group, and along with our fellow Pacific Small Island Developing States, we greatly appreciate the support given to us by the members of this regional group.

Fiji's guiding document, the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, has given our nation the task of enhancing Fiji's international relations, both bilaterally and multi-laterally. In pursuit of this task, since the beginning of last year, Fiji has formalized diplomatic relations with 37 countries, bringing to a total of 114 the number of countries with which Fiji has formal diplomatic relations. Fiji is firmly on the path of formalizing our diplomatic relations with all member States of the United Nations.

Fiji remains steadfastly committed to the work of the United Nations in safeguarding world peace, including all international counter-terrorism efforts. In 2006, Fiji voted in favour of the preparation of a robust Arms Trade Treaty and we commend all those who have shown commitment to preparing this Treaty for signature in 2012.

Fiji's commitment to the Charter of the United Nations remains steadfast. Our tradition of service in the blue helmets of UN Peacekeeping began in 1978 in Lebanon with UNIFIL, in which the Fijian battalion served for 24 years. In 1982, when the Multinational Force and Observers were deployed as peacekeepers in Sinai, a Fijian battalion was amongst them and has remained there to this day.

In Iraq, the United Nations Guard Unit of UNAMI has been manned by Fijians since 2004. With the planned withdrawal of the US Forces from Iraq this year, the United Nations saw fit to increase the size of its UNAMI Guard Unit, and after due process Fiji was selected to provide the extra personnel. We thank the United Nations for the confidence shown in our servicemen and servicewomen.

In addition, Mr. President, Fijian servicemen and servicewomen are currently stationed in Peacekeeping Missions in South Sudan, Abyei, Darfur, Liberia and Timor Leste. I pause here, Mr President, to profess my country's recognition and respect for the selfless service given by UN Peacekeepers in the troubled regions of our world, and to pay tribute to those of them who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Mr. President, Fiji is currently the chair of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the MSG, whose membership includes Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and the FLNKS of New Caledonia. This year, the MSG was pleased to admit Indonesia and Timor Leste to Observer status. Fiji wishes to commend the work of our brother MSG Missions at the United Nations in bringing Melanesian concerns to the attention of the UN Special Political and Decolonisation Committee.

Through its membership of the Decolonisation Committee, Fiji will continue to call for the Committee to conduct effective monitoring and assessment of the progress of New Caledonia's Noumea Accord. In this regard, we would welcome the establishment of arrangements for closer co-operation and information-sharing between the UN Secretariat and the MSG Secretariat. We also express our gratitude to the Government of France for its co-operation and assistance to this end.

Mr. President, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) continue to inspire our economic development efforts. In Fiji, we have concentrated our focus on national infrastructure development under our Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development. Under this Roadmap, priority has been given to rural electrification expansion, access to clean water, and to national roading development. This focus is with the view to create the bedrock required for sustainable economic growth.

Since the reform of Fiji's laws to bring them in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, further progress has been achieved. We are experiencing increasing participation by women in local decision-making bodies, thereby empowering rural women, increased enrolment of women and girls in tertiary education, gender mainstreaming within the

Government system, and increased welfare assistance provision to the marginalized, including single mothers.

The Domestic Violence Decree which came into effect last year is now being effectively implemented by the law enforcement agencies in conjunction with civil society groups. Its regime of restraining orders is intended to deter perpetrators of family violence from inflicting further violence, whilst allowing families to remain together in peace. This Decree recognizes the difficulty experienced by women and children in gaining access to the justice system, because of family, community, cultural and attitudinal barriers.

In order to address the MDG's HIV/AIDS goal, the Fijian Government approved a new law this year that, amongst other things, safeguards the privacy and rights of persons infected or affected by HIV. The HIV/AIDS Decree is based on the United Nations International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS, and on the Declaration of Commitment to a human rights based approach to dealing with the epidemic. The Decree has been acknowledged as one of the most progressive HIV laws in the world.

Fiji participated in and was represented by our Head of State, H.E. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, at the HIV/AIDS High Level Meeting that was held in this hall in August this year.

In addition to the HIV/AIDS Decree, Fiji this year passed the Mental Health Decree, a Decree based on WHO guidelines on best practice for mental patients; and the Child Welfare Decree which creates a system that requires mandatory reporting of child abuse by doctors, police officers and lawyers to the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Fiji is determined to provide to all Fijians enlightened and progressive laws on health care, access to health services and justice.

A large percentage of Fiji's population is at risk of contracting non-communicable disease (NCD), or lifestyle disease, including cardiovascular or cancerous diseases. We welcome the high level commitment of the international community to address this crisis and the successful completion of the High Level Meeting on NCDs this week. The Fijian Government has taken key actions to address NCD issues, including being the first country to

sign and ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. It is also one of the first countries to pilot the salt reduction program.

Mr. President, the economic reforms undertaken by the Fijian Government have produced positive mid-term results. Last month, we were heartened to learn that Fiji's economic standing was assessed at a higher level by the credit-rating agency of Standard & Poor's. This improved rating is also attributed to the strong support of all our development partners, including the private sector, who have worked closely with the Fijian Government. I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their co-operation, assistance and collaboration.

As a Small Island Developing State or SIDS vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, Fiji has a strong desire to see positive and concrete outcomes achieved at the UNFCCC meeting in Durban later this year. We hold firm to the hope of a successful outcome from the UNFCCC negotiations. However, the urgency of the situation for many small islands and low lying coastal States, and the real threat posed by sea level rise, prompted the Pacific SIDS to draw the attention of the UN Security Council to the security implications of climate change. Fiji hopes that the Presidential Declaration adopted by the Council in July this year, at the end of the open debate on the security implications of climate change, will enable the Council to look further into the plight of those countries that are most at risk of losing their territory to climate change.

Mr President, as the first signatory to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Fiji has kept its oceanic obligations at the core of its foreign policy.

With the increasing interest in seabed mining and to avoid a '*race to the bottom*' by countries wishing to exploit the untapped mineral resources on the ocean floor, it is imperative that the International Seabed Authority remains vigilant in safeguarding the environmental integrity of the world's seabed.

Fiji has invested much time and resources to responsible consideration of seabed mining and thus welcomes the Advisory Opinion of the Seabed Disputes Chamber on the responsibilities and obligations of State parties with regards to seabed mining. We also welcome the decision by the Council of the International Seabed Authority in approving the application by Tonga and Nauru for the exploration of polymetallic nodules in the Mid-East Pacific Ocean. We see the Pacific Small Island Developing States as legitimate participants in this oceanic resource.

The Pacific Ocean is the mainstay of our country's livelihood, our food security and our economy. Fiji views the Blue Economy as an essential element of the Green Economy. In this regard, we consider the 2012 Rio de Janeiro UN Conference on Sustainable Development critical to protecting this economy.

Mr. President, since I last addressed the United Nations General Assembly, Fijians have been benefitting from the nation's Strategic Framework for Change. This Framework set in place the roadmap that takes Fiji to the holding of national elections by September 2014.

Under the provisions of the roadmap, from September next year until 2013, our Nation must turn its attention to the development of a new constitution premised along the laudable principles set out in the People's charter for Peace, Change and Progress. The roadmap clearly states that in the process, the new Fijian Constitution must do away with racial categorisation and discrimination; so that for the first time in Fiji's history, Fijians will go to Elections in 2014 on the basis of common and equal suffrage. This will be real progress. It will undo decades of undemocratic laws and policies inherited from our colonial past and entrenched in past Constitutions, which have impeded our nation's progress. This is a determined move to create a society based on substantive equality and justice, and respect for the dignity of all Fijians.

As we enter this formative two-year period in Fiji's history, we recognise that inclusiveness will be an essential part of the process in the formulation of the new Constitution. We also recognise our national responsibility at all times to ensure that the Nation's overall peace, well-being and sustainable economic

development must prevail over divisive factional interests. The Fijian nation will prevail, and we have every confidence that our beloved country has the home-grown ability to pull itself up by its own bootstraps.

In this respect Mr. President I am happy to inform this august gathering that electronic registration of voters for the national elections is scheduled to commence in January of next year.

Mr President, we trust that our trading and development partners, friends, old and new, will give us the understanding, the space, and the assistance we need to ensure that true and sustainable democracy can take root in Fiji. In this regard, we have taken great heart from recent assurances of support from many of our bilateral and multilateral friends, not least of which is the United Nations.

Mr. President, once again my congratulations on your election and best wishes for a productive 66th Session of the General Assembly.

I thank you.

