



Republic of Fiji

**STATEMENT BY COMMODORE JOSAI VOREQE BAINIMARAMA  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI  
AND THE CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77 & CHINA  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
GENERAL DEBATE  
OF THE 68TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**25 September 2013**

*Please check against delivery*

The President of the United Nations General Assembly,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to congratulate you Mr. President, on your election to the Presidency of the General Assembly's 68th Session and express my confidence that under your able and wise guidance, this session will successfully accomplish its many tasks. I would also like to pay tribute to the tireless efforts of your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Vuk Jeremic, and extend my appreciation for the effectiveness with which he directed the work of the last session.

Mr. President,

Fiji reached a pivotal moment in its history earlier this month when His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji promulgated the nation's new Constitution. This Constitution introduces the first genuine democracy Fiji will enjoy since we gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1970.

43 years and three constitutions later, we finally have a Constitution that is worthy of the Fijian people. It is a Constitution that meets the test of a genuine democracy that upholds the legal and moral basis of a common and equal citizenry without denying anyone's individuality or culture.

The 2013 Fijian Constitution enshrines principles that are at the heart of all the world's great liberal democracies – an independent judiciary, a secular state and a wide range of civil, political and socio-economic rights. It recognises the indigenous peoples of Fiji and their customary practices; protects the rights of the predominantly indigenous landowners and also of their tenants; demands accountability and transparency from Government officials; builds strong and independent institutions; and replaces our old weighted electoral system with one based on the principle of one person, one vote, one value.

This historic achievement is the culmination of a path that Fiji embarked on in 2007 to establish a modern and stable society that can be a proud and responsible part of the global community.

Mr. President, for years we struggled to be a nation under a system that created different classes of citizens and in which the votes of some Fijians counted more than others. How could we be one nation when our fundamental law said that we were not one people?

The very idea of a just and equal society, of an accountable government, of loyalty to the nation-state, was being eroded from within. There were too many elites that thought the best way to entrench their own privileges was to sow the seeds of division and undermine our independent institutions. The removals of government in 1987 and 2000 were the most radical expressions of this dysfunction.

As a result, tens of thousands of Fijians suffered and many made the decision to leave their home forever, to leave Fiji. As I have said before, this is one of the most shameful episodes of our history and I determined that this must never, never happen again. We must never allow a fellow citizen to be second class, to be less than an equal of his neighbor.

Surely, such a basic principle as this deserves the full support of all nations that would never accept any less for their own people.

So we set out to make change for the good, permanent change that would set the nation on a straight course and allow Fiji to finally reach the potential it had when we so enthusiastically embraced our independence.

It has been a long journey and we have faced numerous challenges along the way. But it is with great pleasure and deep honour that I stand here today and say, "Our national compass has finally been reset." [HOLD UP CONSTITUTION] Under this new Constitution, we're heading towards Fiji's first genuinely democratic elections by September 2014, and a much brighter future, as one nation.

Every month that passes we are building the foundations of our new parliamentary democracy. Unlike in the past, we are building a credible and fair system that will guide this process. Four political parties have registered thus far under new laws that create transparency and accountability and, close to 540,000 Fijians – out of an estimated 620,000 eligible voters – have registered for the 2014 election.

Many modern, stable democracies have gone through their own turbulent periods. Some have gone through decades of instability and bloodshed, while others have had a single defining moment. These events changed the course of history. They turned their countries from bastions of elitism and oppression into nations of freedom, equality and true democracy.

The United States has its Bunker Hill and Civil War; France has the storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution; Australia, Eureka Stockade; and Britain a bloody history to establish constitutional monarchy.

Regrettably, and to our great disappointment, some of these oldest friends had no faith in us. They abandoned us and sought to punish us with sanctions. We sought their assistance and understanding, but they turned their backs on us. They chose to support a form of democracy, governance and justice in Fiji that they would never have accepted for themselves.

We hope that they see now that we were true to our word. All nations struggle over time to overcome their unique challenges, to correct historic sins, and to be worthy of the principles on which they were founded. We are no different.

Our isolation led us to seek out new relationships that have proven fruitful. Now, our standing in the world has never been stronger.

A key principle that has guided Fiji's political development and foreign policy, soundly grounded in the Charter of the United Nations, is that we determine our own destinies as sovereign states. At the same time, we recognise the necessity of collaborating with all Member States of the United Nations with the aim of sustainable world peace, substantive justice, dignity and respect for all.

It is that spirit of collaboration that inspires us to go beyond parochial interests and to reach out to help others. To this end, it enjoins us to be loyal to common ideals, goals, values and principles. They remain the guiding beacons as we navigate our way forward in this millennium.

Mr. President,

The theme you have set to guide the general debate at this 68<sup>th</sup> session, which is "*The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage*," is most fitting for this junction of the road at which the UN stands. In the midst of increasing poverty and underdevelopment, during an era of unprecedented wealth accumulation and technological advances, the rift that divides the rich and the poor zones of the world ever widens. We must therefore not lose focus on one imperative of our time, that equality among nations, big and small, is central to the relevance, credibility, and even survival of this global organisation.

In this regard, we are encouraged by the progress made thus far in the General Assembly to expeditiously launch the follow-up mechanisms agreed at the Rio+20 Conference last year. Throughout the course of this year, the G77 and China has emphasised that the roadmap towards a post-2015 development agenda needs to address the implementation gaps of the MDGs, with poverty eradication remaining an overarching goal. The new development agenda must be universal, applicable and relevant to all Member States. Let me also stress that the new development agenda should be centred on economic development which supports both social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Our common desire for a transformative global development agenda beyond 2015 can best be achieved through collective efforts and an enhanced global partnership. These efforts must place the development and wellbeing of people at its core. If the international community and national governments seriously commit to an agenda for meaningful transformation on structural, institutional and normative levels, the post-2015 development agenda has the potential of achieving a paradigm shift in global conditions.

Mr. President,

Fiji's commitment to being a good global citizen is manifested through our ongoing engagement with the United Nations and its associated agencies and secretariats.

Our decision to take on the mantle of chairing the Group of 77 & China for the year 2013 was informed by the fact that Fiji embraces its rights as an equal member of the United Nations, and that

we must therefore also carry all the due responsibilities expected of us amongst this great family of nations.

Fiji's commitment to UN peacekeeping remains unwavering. It is a source of great pride that for a nation of our size, we are able to make a meaningful and significant contribution. For the last three decades, we have always responded to the call of the UN to serve, including in the most difficult circumstances around the world. While fully recognising the risks involved, Fiji's confidence in its peacekeepers prompted us to provide troops to the Golan Heights this year to assist the UN in a time of need. The many years of service of Fijian troops in the Middle East region, particularly in Lebanon, Iraq and Sinai, is an asset that our troops take with them to that mission. Fiji also sees police peacekeeping and contributions in the corrections and justice sector, as important in building local state institutions that can be run by local authorities once the peacekeeping missions end, and we are building on our many existing commitments in that regard in Liberia, Darfur and South Sudan.

It is up to us in the General Assembly to ensure that all support possible is given to troop-contributing countries and police-contributing countries serving on the ground, including through clear and appropriate policy guidance. For the good of the countries concerned, we must not abdicate that responsibility, and I urge us all to work together in the UN to provide such concrete policy guidance, particularly as we see peacekeeping missions evolve into multi-dimensional and complex missions that differ greatly from early UN peacekeeping missions.

Mr. President,

As a Pacific island nation, Fiji reaffirms its support for the efforts of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to achieve sustainable development. Not only are SIDS acutely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as sea-level rise, ocean acidification and the increased frequency of extreme weather events, but for some of us, the threat is to our very existence. Our response to the plight of those most at risk must therefore be characterised by a requisite sense of urgency.

The convening of the Third International Conference for Sustainable Development of SIDS in 2014 is critical to addressing, in a very specific and concrete manner, the many challenges faced by SIDS. It is an opportunity for the international community to renew its commitment to the implementation of the decisions and agreements pertaining to SIDS. As the international community discusses the post-2015 development landscape, including a successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action, we must ensure that a new model accounts for, and addresses, the risks we face. This is particularly relevant for SIDS, where hundreds of millions of dollars in economic losses occur as a result of so-called 'natural' disasters every year. Protecting development gains and investing in disaster resilience is vital to sustainable development.

Mr. President,

The United Nation's efforts to eradicate colonialism must forge ahead within the context of the Special Political and Decolonisation Committee, where Fiji is a member. Through the Pacific regional body known as the Melanesian Spearhead Group, Fiji works together with other members of the C24 to accelerate the process of decolonisation.

In reforming and developing its information and communication technology infrastructure, Fiji has adopted a comprehensive approach by combining a national framework for ICT development with effective and pragmatic policies and initiatives to deliver results directly to the Fijian people. That

approach is bearing fruit. Fiji has achieved 95% mobile coverage, including 3G, concluded one of the region's first open auctions for 4G spectrum, and is implementing a number of innovative initiatives to increase affordable access and improve services, including in the most remote parts of our country.

The International Telecommunication Union in its annual review of more than 150 countries' delivery of ICT infrastructure and services to their populations, gave special recognition to Fiji as a developing country. Fiji tied for the third largest improvement of any country and is ranked 4th globally in percentage terms, improving by 14 per cent.

Mr. President,

As the first country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Fiji has kept its oceanic obligations at the core of its foreign policy. While some disconnect exists between what is contained in international instruments and what is or is not implemented, we need a commitment for clear steps to turn words into actions in order to facilitate the sustainable management of ocean resources and make equitable the share of benefits from their utilisation.

Fiji hosted the inaugural Pacific Islands Development Forum last month. Its formation makes the PIDF the only south-south organisation in the Pacific region that provides for a multi-stakeholder platform where governments, the private sector and civil society can discuss what we, Pacific Islanders need to do, to achieve sustainable development.

We look forward to a productive 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Let me reiterate our full support and cooperation towards you and all members, with a view to advancing the objectives of the United Nations and the aspirations of the global community.

*Vinaka vakalevu.* Thank you.

