



# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

PARLIAMENT COMPLEX, GLADSTONE ROAD  
P.O. BOX 2352, GOVERNMENT BUILDING, SUVA



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## INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH MOU SIGNING AND LAUNCH

18<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2019

KEYNOTE SPEECH:

SIR RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU

THE REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DR.  
CHITRALEKHA MASSEY,

THE SECRETARY GENERAL, PACIFIC ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT FORUM, MR FRANCOIS MARTEL.

THE ACTING VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FIJI PROFESSOR SUBRAMANI,

THE COORDINATOR OF THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH, DR. SHAISTA SHAMEEM

THE FORMER GOVERNOR GENERAL OF NEW ZEALAND AND HIS GOOD LADY, THEIR EXCELLENCIES SIR  
ANAND SATYANAND AND LADY SUSAN SATYANAND (WHO ARE HERE IN SPIRIT).

PACIFIC ISLAND DEVELOPMENT FORUM REPRESENTATIVE, MR MARK BORG,

HIS EXCELLENCY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER OF AUSTRALIA,

THE CHARGE DE AFFAIRS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH COMMISSION,

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

GOOD EVENING, NI SA BULA VINAKA SALAAM ALYKUM NAMASTE

TODAY IS NELSON MANDELA DAY – A DAY THAT CELEBRATES THE LIFE OF AN EXTRAORDINARY  
INDIVIDUAL, A STATESMAN WHO EMBODIED THE IDEALS THAT ALL COUNTRIES SHOULD STRIVE TO

PROTECT. NELSON MANDELA ONCE SAID, “EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.” ALONG THIS LINE, I AM HONOURED TO BE A SMALL PART IN LAUNCHING THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH.

FIJI IS A LEADER IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE, AND WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS REPRESENT THE HUMAN FACE OF ITS DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS.

RECENTLY, FIJI HAS MADE SOME NOTEWORTHY PROGRESS TOWARDS ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS. IN 2019, FIJI BECAME A MEMBER OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT, AND WE MUST SUSTAIN THIS MOMENTUM TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS ON A REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SCALE.

LAUNCHING THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH BUILDS UPON THIS IMPORTANT MILESTONE. THIS SIGNIFIES A MAJOR STEP FORWARD FOR FIJI AND THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES. DURING THIS EARLY PHASE OF THE INSTITUTE’S DEVELOPMENT, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR OUR PACIFIC COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE.

IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A LEADING CROSS -DISCIPLINARY CENTRE IN THIS REGION THAT HELPS PACIFIC ISLANDERS TO ENJOY GREATER FREEDOMS AND RIGHTS.

I MUST COMMEND THE EFFORT TAKEN BY THIS PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN A NATIONAL ACADEMIC INSTITUTION, A REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTION DEDICATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS IS INDEED A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF HOW DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN THE PACIFIC COULD BE IMPLEMENTED.

OF COURSE THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IS THE AGENCY THAT IS MANDATED WITH ONE OF THE HIGHEST RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM – WHICH IS TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS; AND THE PROMOTION, AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL OF THOSE HUMAN RIGHTS, THAT IS OUR RIGHTS – YOURS AND MINE.

EVERY PERSON FROM THE TIME THEY ARE BORN IS ENTITLED TO THE FULL REALISATION OF THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE VERY BASIS OF HUMAN DIGNITY. HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT JUST AN IDEA –

THEY ARE ENSHRINED IN A CONSTITUTION OF A COUNTRY, DOMESTIC LAWS, AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES THAT OUR GOVERNMENTS HAVE FORMALLY AGREED TO AND ARE OBLIGATED TO FULLY IMPLEMENT AND UPHOLD.

WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT RESPECTED, THIS IS CALLED A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE KNOW WHAT ARE OUR HUMAN RIGHTS, IN ORDER TO ASSESS WHETHER THEY MAY HAVE BEEN VIOLATED.

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS WE NEED TO KEEP IN MIND THAT THESE ARE OUR RIGHTS AS A COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUALLY. THESE ARE NOT RIGHTS THAT OTHERS WANT TO IMPOSE ON US BUT OUR OWN RIGHTS THAT WE NEED TO PROTECT AND DEFEND.

PACIFIC CULTURES VALUES FAIRNESS, RESPECT, PROTECTION OF THE MOST VULNERABLE, HELPING AND SERVING OTHERS, PARTICIPATION, DIALOGUE AND CONSENSUS BUILDING. TO PROTECT AND LOVE SOMETHING YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT, AND I BELIEVE THAT THIS IS WHERE THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH CAN CONTRIBUTE THE MOST.

I MUST ADMIT THAT EVEN AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF OUR INSTITUTIONS THERE ARE STILL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AND MANY HAVE ARGUED THAT NOT ALL HUMAN RIGHTS ARE SUITABLE FOR OUR CULTURES. SO WE DO NEED TO CHANGE SUCH PERCEPTIONS AND LEARN MORE ON THE TYPES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THAT EXISTS IN THE PACIFIC BUT WE ALSO NEED TO DO RESEARCH THAT IS FIJI AND PACIFIC-CENTRIC.

WE NEED TO LOOK AT HUMAN RIGHTS FROM OUR OWN EYES AND EXPERIENCES AND WE NEED TO CHALLENGE THEM WITH OUR OWN ACCEPTED AND SOMETIMES UNCHALLENGED PERCEPTIONS OR ASSUMPTIONS.

CHANGE BROUGHT ABOUT BY RESEARCH AND POLICY CAN TAKE MANY FORMS: SUCH AS REMOVING DISCRIMINATION IN LAWS AND POLICIES, IMPROVING THE PRACTICES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, PROMOTING BETTER WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS, AND CHALLENGING NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES ABOUT VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE COMMUNITY ESPECIALLY WOMEN,

**CHILDREN, MINORITIES, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, OLD AGED AND THE LGTBI PERSONS.**

**HOWEVER, IT IS LONG TERM WORK AND REQUIRES EVERYONE TO GET INVOLVED AND WHO WILL WORK AS PARTNERS – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS – TO HELP BUILD COMMUNITIES WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PEOPLE ARE RESPECTED, PROTECTED AND FULFILLED.**

**WHICH IS WHY THIS PARTNERSHIP IS IMPORTANT – WHILE THE ACADEMIA FOCUS ON THE RESEARCH, THE DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS FOCUS ON THE APPLICABILITY OF THE RESEARCH BLENDING THIS WITH INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCES. RESEARCH DONE THROUGH THIS INSTITUTE SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE AIM TO INFORM NATIONAL POLICY AND REVIEW LAWS.**

**I AM PLEASED TO NOTE THAT THROUGH THIS PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF FIJI, THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT FORUM, THE INSTITUTE WILL CONDUCT AND SUPPORT PACIFIC-FOCUSSED RESEARCH ON VARIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES WITH PRACTICAL APPLICATION.**

**IT WILL ALSO OFFER SHORT EDUCATIONAL COURSES FOR DIFFERENT SECTORS OF OUR COMMUNITY. ON A BROADER LEVEL, THE INSTITUTE WILL PROMTE DYNAMIC DIALOGUE AND DEBATE ON TOPICS RELATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS SPECIFIC TO THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES.**

**THESE ACTIVITIES ARE VITAL TO A COUNTRY THAT VALUES HUMAN RIGHTS AND HAS A GROWING PRESENCE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE. AND AS OUR INFLEUNCE CONTINUES TO EXPAND, SO DOES OUR OBLIGATION TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES THROUGH ROBUST RESEARCH, CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE AND INCREASING AWARENESS.**

**ONE OF THE MAJOR ISSUES IN THE WORLD IS THAT SOME OF THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, EVEN TODAY, STILL REFUSE TO ACCEPT THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN INESCAPABLE REALITY FOR THE PACIFIC. IT HAS EXACERBATED THE EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS WHICH HAVE BATTERED MANY PACIFIC ISLANDS IN RECENT YEARS, CAUSING LOSS OF LIFE AND DAMAGE TO LIVELIHOODS ON AN UNPRECEDENTED SCALE.**

RISING SEA LEVELS THREATEN THE VERY EXISTENCE OF SOME ISLANDS AND NATIONS, WHERE EXTRAORDINARILY RESILIENT CULTURES ARE IN PERIL. PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES HAVE HAD ALMOST NO INVOLVEMENT IN GENERATING CLIMATE CHANGE BUT ARE THE MOST AFFECTED AND SUFFERING VICTIMS. WHAT ARE OUR RIGHTS WHEN IT COMES TO CLIMATE JUSTICE? WHAT CAN WE DO? WHAT SORT OF ASSISTANCE OR REMEDIES ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW WILL BE KEY TO SOLVING THE EXISTING CHALLENGES OF THE PACIFIC REGION BUT THESE QUESTIONS CAN ONLY BE ANSWERED THROUGH PROPER RESEARCH INTO THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PACIFIC.

THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH WILL HELP US FULFIL THIS OBLIGATION AND SOLIDIFY OUR LEADERSHIP ROLE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PACIFIC.

I BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE TARGET GROUPS FOR THIS COLLABORATION ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT OF FIJI, OF WHICH I AM THE SPEAKER AND I CERTAINLY LOOK FORWARD TO COLLABORATING WITH THIS NEW INSTITUTE AND ITS PARTNERS TO HAVE SOME IMPACTFUL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND THE PARLIAMENTARY STAFF.

I UNDERSTAND THERE IS A LOT OF PREPATORY WORK TO BE DONE BEFORE WE GET THERE BUT THE SOONER THE BETTER – THERE IS CERTAINLY NO TIME TO LOSE.

I THANK EVERYONE FOR COMING TO THIS EVENT AND I HOPE THAT WE WILL WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PACIFIC.

THANK YOU, VINAKA VAKALEVU, SHUKRIA AND BAHOOT DHANYBAAD.

END.